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EIGHTEEN — PENCE

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HAVING promised in the introductory chapter of this volume to dispense with the formality of a preface, a few words, not meriting so grave a title, will suffice to say that the historical personages who appear in it were sketched from life, that Victor's *destiny* is recorded in the annals of the startling period when it was fulfilled, and that the African characters are real, and have literally spoken for themselves.

In regard to all the other characters, while they are believed to be true to nature, and were intended to represent traits and dispositions which are not unfrequently met with in real life, the writer begs to enter a protest against the identification of any of these portraits, not belonging to the domain of public history, with individual personages, either past or present.

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HOME AND THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

AVONMORE.

TRUTH is often more marvellous than fiction, and the most successful writers of romance, like the great painters of old, owe their success to their faithful portraiture of nature: but as it is impossible to "breathe the breath of life" into either pictures or romances, it is fair to place the lights and shadows so as to produce harmony and beauty, and if, for the sake of contrast, some of the shadows are very dark indeed, and some of the lights are almost supernal, we should not pronounce the picture unnatural.

The divine Raphael, studied, reproduced, gazed at, admired and loved, unites all suffrages, not only because he is true to nature, but because he represents nature in her loveliest and most graceful forms. The writers of romance would do well to remember that while the pictures of Raphael, always bearing the impress of the "beauty of holiness," are still of priceless value, and counted as are brilliants among precious stones, works of equal genius but of debasing tendency are sinking into oblivion and contempt.

To the utilitarian who despises both the pictures of the mind and the pencil, who tramples the flowers scattered in our daily path beneath his busy feet, those flowers more delicately and gorgeously attired than "Solomon in all his glory," who sees in the sparkling stream and dashing waterfall only the requisite power to put his machinery in motion, in "the moon walking in brightness" only some vague indication of the state of the tide that brings his heavily freighted ship into harbour, in even the glorious sunlight only economy of fuel and gas, it is in vain to appeal. To such we would only send a collection of the choicest and

freshest, but most useless flowers, with a copy of Dickens' "Hard Times."

The lovers of the ideal, the imaginative, the beautiful, have their warrant in those parables so full of pathos, of heavenly wisdom, of sublime grandeur. "One jot" of these can "never pass away," and while the world stands, there will be writers and readers of works of imagination. Let these works then, like the steam which has revolutionized the world, instead of being suppressed, receive a proper direction, and then—

"And then," the readers of my story are ready to exclaim, "we are to have a utilitarian discourse on this mighty theme!" Patience, gentle friends! this was only the preface; but knowing from experience, how little favour a preface finds with fair readers, it is placed at the beginning of the first chapter, that you may not skip at once into the story, without having some idea of what you may encounter in your travels. Yet you shall not be taxed too heavily, lest you throw the volume aside altogether; so now imagine the *overture* completed, the Corypheus lowering his baton and wiping his forehead, and the curtain withdrawn from our picture. You shall find it not only a *tableau vivant*, but a *tableau parlant*.

Christmas was at hand—the blessed season that makes cold hearts warm and old hearts young; when thoughts of the year that is past, and trembling anticipation of the new year about to dawn, are alike merged in present happiness: when to those who "sit in darkness" the "light springs up," when the "wise and noble," following the bright star of the East, offer their costly gifts as of old at the Redeemer's feet, and when even the joyous and tender accents of childhood are heard lisping the name of the babe of Bethlehem.

How and when this season of thanksgiving and joy and peace came to be transferred to the new year, while Christmas often passes neglected by, with some few religious advances, too often, alas! rather cold and heartless, or else used only as a time of holiday and good cheer for the and the servants of the rich, it would be difficult to say. "dings of great joy" were proclaimed to all,—the that "shone around" was sent to illumine the hearts dwellings of the great as well as of the humble. the cordial greeting, the friendly embrace, the bright welcome, are now reserved for the new year alone. ies. gifts. letters. visits. all the gems of "love's

shining circle" are set in one glittering diadem to adorn the brow of the idolized new year. Christmas, the life and soul of both new and old year, is too often left unadorned, but by the single radiant star that still leads on the faithful, while the fashion of this world places a soulless image in the shrine which the true light should illuminate.

Such innovations had found no favour at Avonmore, the country-seat of Mr. Melville, and the present scene of our story. Christmas was at hand, and the inmates of the old home were busily engaged in preparations for the festive season.

How the noble hickory-wood fires, piled up with artistic skill in the wide hearths, blazed and sparkled ! giving out not only their genial warmth, but a light that paled the wintry sunbeams stealing in through the sheltering crimson curtains. How merrily the sound of gay young voices and ringing laughter echoed through the great hall, as the finishing touches were put to the decoration of the Christmas tree ! the tree of golden fruit and perennial bloom, around which lay so many bright hopes, so many tender and loving thoughts of home !

But this mysterious tree, with its garlands and fruits and flowers, was carefully screened from view until the blissful moment when the tiny wax tapers with which the decorations were plentifully interspersed should blaze forth, and give its glories to the wondering eyes and eager hands of the admiring little throng, who were each to claim a portion of its treasures.

If a tableau vivant had been wanting in the preparation, as it was expected in the progress of the fête, a prettier one could not have been devised than the group clustered around that Christmas tree. It was properly the charge of little Alice, who with her friends anticipated the chief enjoyment of it ; but her efforts would have been unavailing to render it worthy of her friends and her lovely little self, for a lovely child she was, that little Alice ! and none could look into her deep blue eyes, or on her dimpled cheeks, or her golden ringlets, without thinking of something better than our every-day thoughts suggest.

She stood on tip-toe, with her hands resting on the table from which rose the tree, looking eagerly and alternately into the faces of her brother and sister, which were bent lovingly down toward her, and never were three more beaming and beautiful faces in such close proximity.

"Now Constance ! now Vivian !" she cried, "lift me up that I may see those bunches of cherries and currants on the

top. I wonder if Ellen and Anna will take them for real fruit!"

Her brother playfully obeyed the command, and seated her on his shoulder.

"Take your last look, little puss," he said, kissing her and setting her gently down, after she had made a satisfactory survey of the mimic fruits, "for this mysterious door must be shut until the moment has arrived for the important revelation. Now trot off, and if you chance to meet Johnson in the hall, tell him to tell Hostler Dick to have Wildair saddled for me. I promised mamma two dozen partridges as my contribution to her Christmas dinner, and I have hardly time to redeem my promise, unless I shoot them on the ground, which a true sportsman would scorn."

"Your message will hardly facilitate the object," said Constance, laughing. "Let us see. You tell Alice to tell Johnson to tell——"

"Oh, true, true!" cried Vivian. "I take the hint, as I told you I would, whenever you remind me of our southern propensities. I'm off! tell——"

But Constance held up her small white hand, with the forefinger menacingly raised, and he was gone in a moment. Soon he was seen in the distance with a Manton on his shoulder, and a pointer dog at Wildair's heels. It would have required but little imagination to fancy the man, the horse, the dog, and the gun, all part and parcel of each other, so harmoniously were they grouped, so lithe and easy and graceful was the animated part of the picture.

"Thar' he goes!" exclaimed Hostler Dick, suspending the operation of the wisp of straw with which he was polishing down the legs of his horses, and looking with evident pride and exultation after his young master. "Wuth while to de that a way, hey, Uncle Tom? wouldn't ha' had such at as that, howsomever, if I hadn't ha' larnt him; didn't Now that's what I calls—a hawss!"

The last superlative of admiration was doubtless intended for the rider instead of the animal; but since the celebrated of a western eulogium on the Father of his Country, with—"In short, fellow-citizens, General Washington—a horse!"—we need not wonder that Hostler Dick have found his beau-ideal of perfection in the stable, his days were chiefly passed.

so in eloquy, or his observation, whichever it might be
fo and its way over the gate that divided the stable
on the lower part of the house which was

voted to culinary plants, and where "Uncle Tom" was engaged with a hoe in uncovering some fine white celery.

A large gray cat, which was as constantly his companion as the cat of the Godolphin Arabian was the inseparable of her equine friend, was lying near him on a tuft of grass. Puss was basking and blinking in the sun, her upturned nose and yellow eyes, their long pupils diminished to a thread, sheltered by her tail curled daintily around them.

As Uncle Tom was a character in his way, we shall take the liberty of presenting him to our reader. He was an old man, older perhaps in his own reminiscences than in reality, though his white hair, or rather wool, proved his right to the venerable age he claimed. There was an air of neatness and comfort in his thick gray homespun suit and clean shirt collar, in his warm woollen hose and stout shoes, and in the striped gray and white cap of fine worsted which appeared beneath his broad-brimmed hat. The cap, he boasted, "Mistis knit for him with her own white hands." So much for his outward man; to judge fairly of him, he must speak for himself.

"Yes!" he replied to Hostler Dick's observation, and apparently comprehending the intended application of the epithet of *hawss*, "he's as fine a lad as you'll meet with anywhar' between this and Kentucky. But you needn't say, boy, *you* larnt him to ride. *You* larn *him*, indeed! why you might jes as well say you larnt a hawss to cat grass. It's natur, chile; it's natur. Young master was on a pillow 'fore master ridin' when he warn't more'n so high," measuring about a foot of the hoe handle; "and jes as soon as his little legs could straddle the hawss, jump! he was up ahind. You larn *him*, indeed!" And Uncle Tom resumed his digging with increased energy, as if to work off his indignation at the suggestion.

"Well, you needn't git mad 'bout it, Uncle Tom," said Dick, in a deprecatory tone; "I didn't 'zactly say I larnt him; I only ax *you*, didn't I larn him? Can't you len' a han' here a minnit and help a poor feller fix these here hawsses? Sam's gone somewhar' for master, and Jem's laid up; he's allays laid up, Jem is, whenever Christmas comes round. And here's Bess, and Flora, and the carriage hawsses to clean and litter. Jes len' a han'; Uncle Tom," said Dick, coaxingly.

"Well," said Uncle Tom, soothed by the concession made to his superior judgment, "I'm allays willin' to help a fellow-creetur when he'll listen to reason." And with an alacrity

that showed his possession of the power to "len' a han" when the will guided him, Uncle Tom busied himself with cleaning and rubbing down the horses until their polished coats shone like a mirror.

"Thar', now," he exclaimed, straightening himself up with an additional interjection of "whew!" "Thar's what would make a day's work for you and Sam and Jem, all put together. Well, what's to pay now?"

This last inquiry was addressed to a little urchin, who came skipping down to the stable with an alternate hop, step, and jump.

"What's to pay now?" repeated Uncle Tom, as soon as the cessation of the joyous exercise gave the boy breath to reply.

"Gran'mammy wants the key o' your hen-us, sir. There's fresh eggs wantin' at the kitchen, sir." Uncle Tom always exacted this "*sir*" from his numerous descendants.

"Well, chile; ain't she got no eyes? the key's right in the cupboard afore 'em, if she had any to see with, poor old creetur."

The boy was hopping off with the message, when Uncle Tom hailed him.

"Look 'e here, chile! what sort o' foolishness you call that? Why don't you use both your legs as God has given you in his goodness, instead o' standin' on one leg, jes like a goose as you is? Come here to me, sir. Now that I think on it, how come you to be swar'in' when you was a sweepin' the walks yesterday? *huccom* you to swar'—how comed *you* to swar?" with a strong emphasis on the variations made in the sentence.

"*Me* swar', sir?" answered the boy, opening his round eyes to their largest dimensions; "*me* swar'? I never *did* swar', sir, in all my born days."

"Now don't go for to tell me no stories," pursued Uncle Tom. "Mistis tell me her own self, as how Miss Alice heard you say 'The devil!' when you was a sweepin' the walks."

The round eyes subsided to their usual dimensions, and the boy's mouth in turn expanded to the broadest possible

"I warn't a swar'in' gran'daddy, I was jes' sayin' that new me you larnt me, 'bout the devil tempt the 'ooman, and 'ooman tempt the man."

"Clar' out, you little varmint!" said Uncle Tom, his eyes at once relaxing from their severity into an expression hardly less waggish than that of his grandson. "Clar'

out!—make tracks!" he continued, "or I'll throw something at you!"

The boy dexterously caught the apple which Uncle Tom took from his pocket and pretended to aim at his head, and disappeared this time, in a twinkling, on both legs.

"Now, sure as I'm alive," said Uncle Tom, after this feat, "thar's them young ladies a comin' down the garden, and I've been a cleanin' o' hawsses instead o' gittin' the green things as I promised 'em, but I must git this here salary fust, any how."

He resumed his hoe and continued his work, as if in ignorance of the gradual approach of the two young girls, who, with their arms linked lovingly together, were sauntering down the garden walk, apparently thinking more of the bright sunshine and their own gay converse, than of Uncle Tom, or the evergreens he had promised for their Christmas decorations. Their warm winter attire, suited for a walk in the country, gave to view but little of their charms, and hardly more could be seen than four of the brightest eyes, and occasionally, as the conversation became more animated, two rows of the purest pearls that ever sparkled within roseate lips.

The scene around them was one which even the "ruler of the inverted year" could not entirely deprive of its beauty. A profusion of evergreen trees were scattered in every direction through the extensive grounds of Avonmore among the choice deciduous varieties planted by succeeding generations; and if it were not literally "the land of the cedar and myrtle," there was quite enough of his first named favourite to realize the poet's dream. His second was well represented by the perennial box to which the growth of a century had given the dignity of trees. The feathery Weymouth pine, the arbor-vitæ, the balm of Gilead, the holly with its clustering crimson berries, and, most beautiful of all, the glittering magnolia grandiflora, redeemed the landscape from its otherwise wintry aspect, and seemed almost to contradict the certainty that the "Frost King" was at hand.

The songsters who, at a more propitious season, would have given fresh life to these their favourite summer haunts, were mute. Only the superb cardinal, better known by his every day title of "Red-bird," flitted by like a "fire flaught," and proudly raising his plumed head, glanced as patronisingly and haughtily at our two nymphs, as if he had been a young officer just promoted in the Life Guards of Queen Victoria.

The house was just visible through the trees from the point they had attained, and, like the grounds, showed the work of successive generations. The original structure had received many additions, some of the latest claiming a title to architectural taste, and completely overshadowing the modest pointed gables of the ancient parts of the building. The wings that flanked it, spread themselves out as if to embrace the family and its often numerous visitors within their hospitable shelter, and gave to very prudent people the idea that they might, at some future day, without good management on the part of the proprietor, assist the house to "take the estate on its back, and fly away with it."

This, however, would have been rather a heavy task, as the domain embraced several thousand acres, and the wide-spreading fields and regal-looking forests nearest in the view belonged to it, and were yearly appreciating in value.

But the elevation of the site gave a prospect far more extensive than the immediate vicinity, and offered every variety to the lovers of rural scenery. The blue line of the horizon stretched out in a semicircle on one side, broken only by a few shadowy peaks of mountains that resembled ships on the far distant ocean, and was met by the bold indentations of a chain of mountains on the other. The sinuosities of a river, though not sufficiently near to complete the beauty of the landscape by a water view, were indicated by a vapour of fleecy white that marked its course, and might to a casual observer have been mistaken for the river itself.

Neither city nor village was in sight, and the neighbouring country seats were too much embosomed in trees to be visible. Only through a vista cut apparently for the purpose in a fine skirt of wood appeared the castellated tower of the church; for a church there was, and one of such uncommon beauty that it excited the wonder of transatlantic strangers who sometimes visited this remote region, how such structures should "rise like exhalations" throughout our favoured land without the aid of an establishment. Near, though separated by a cultivated field, rose another wood of primeval trees, whose giant arms were in bold relief against the clear blue sky.

"There is the Tarleton wood of which I told you, Evelyn," said Constance Melville to her young companion, for as the latter may have surmised, one of these fair friends was a member of the family. "And there is the old oak tree, so completely covered with mistletoe, that it seems to wave its branches of emeralds and pearls, as if in mocking triumph at its less fortunate neighbours."

"What an imagination you have, Constance?" replied Evelyn, "garlands of emeralds and pearls! why you rival Aladdin's lamp with your fancied treasures. But how are we to rob the old tree of those treasures unless we can find an Aladdin to help us?"

"I think I see one of oriental extraction at least, if not one possessed of oriental magic," said Constance, pointing to Uncle Tom. "But I am almost afraid to invoke the magician's art; not that I am in terror of any witchcraft, or being spirited up to the top of the tree, but this air is rather keen to listen to any of the 'thousand and one' tales and anecdotes with which he generally regales us. In a spring morning, when the garden is in Eden-like freshness, it is but fair to listen to him while we gather the roses he cultivates so sedulously, to make up our bouquets; but like the world, as we have heard of it, not as we have yet found it, Evelyn, we are too apt to run away from our benefactor, when we have no interests to subserve."

"A precious confession!" returned Evelyn. "As a punishment for so grave an offence, I mean to keep you prisoner for at least ten minutes, while I hear one of these thousand and one Arabian nights."

"Ten minutes, my dear!" exclaimed Constance, laughing; "why, you might as well have limited the Princess Scheherezade to so brief a space. The story of the Tarleton wood alone would occupy far more time than you propose, and I, having heard it as often as Edith Bellenden was doomed to hear the description of the breakfast or *disjeune* his most sacred majesty Charles the Second was pleased to take at the castle of Tilletudlem, listen to it now rather abstractedly, I confess. But if you insist upon it, you are fairly entitled to any amusement you can gather from this or any other source, before our jour de fête arrives."

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE TOM'S FREEDOM.

"Good morning, young ladies? The tip top o' the morning to you, young ladies," said Uncle Tom, as Constance and her friend approached, scrupulously adding the *g* to his repetition of the word *morning*, for he always adapted his style of speaking to his company and on the present occasion was nice to a *g* if not to a *t*. He accompanied the salutation by

taking off his hat, and bowing twice, so low that it would have been difficult to determine whether the *salaam* was made through profound respect or waggish drollery. It was probably a mixture of both."

"Happy to see you again, Miss Evelyn," he continued. "Happy to see you at the old place once more. Now, Miss Constance," this rather aside, and in the earnestness of his apology forgetting his aristocratic style, "I'm a guine this very minnit to git the things as I promised you, jes as soon as ever I can fix this here salary."

"Thank you, Uncle Tom," replied Constance, hoping for this time to escape the "thousand and one." "But what have you there in those funny looking boxes by you?"

"Them boxes? the littlest one's got a Christmas present in it for Miss Alice: it's a little ground-squirrel. You can see him through that hole: he ain't much bigger than a mouse, for all he's got such a handsome bushy tail. I know she ain't guine to keep him, she's so tender-hearted, bñt she'll have the fun of letting him out and seeing him run away."

"And you want to know what's in the biggest box? well, it's nothing in life but a 'possum that my tarrier dog Teucer caught for me last night. You don't surely want to see such a ugly varmint as a 'possum, Miss Evelyn?" he added interrogatively, seeing the girls peeping curiously through the bars laid on the top of his prison-house, to prevent the escape of the animal.

"Certainly I do, Uncle Tom; I never saw one before, as often as I have heard of them. Why, what a ridiculous looking creature!"

"Ridic'lus!" said Uncle Tom, "you ain't half seen him yet. Laugh for the ladies, Poss? laugh, now, I tell you!" repeated Uncle Tom, accompanying his exhortation with a slight poke in the ribs of "Poss" with the end of the hoe handle through the bars of the box.

The creature's keen eyes shot forth an angry glance, and it uttered a low sound something between a growl and a hiss, raised its peaked muzzle and spread its jaws to their widest possible extent, displaying every one of a row of white sharp-pointed teeth. The effect was so ludicrous, that the girls were surprised into a burst of merry laughter.

"Well done, Poss," cried Uncle Tom. "Now that's what perlte, to do as you're bid when the ladies wanted to laugh. I'll eat you all the better for making your-greeable."

"your pet?" said Constance, shrinking back.

"Pet, indeed!" replied Uncle Tom. "Don't catch *me* makin' a pet out o' a 'possum. No, indeed! Miss Constance. I'll have him for dinner to-morrow. Why, he's jest as nice as any young pig, 'specially when he's set with sweet potatoes all round him in the dish. I only wish 'twas fitten for me to ask such quality as you young ladies to come and taste him.

"But now, he's got a heap more sense in that 'ere ugly noddle o' his'n than you'd think. Now last night, Teucer and me was up near the mountain, and we see him and a raccoon holdin' of a congress up 'pon top o' the fence. Teucer, he crep up close to 'em to hear the 'scussion. Says Poss to Coon, 'Look 'e here, narrow-face, you jes keep off that 'ere dog, and I'll help, when help's a wantin'!' So Coon, he fights off the dog, and Poss, he lays down, and pretends to be dead or 'sleep. 'Look 'e here, Poss,' says Coon, 'why don't *you* help?' 'Can't!' says Poss, 'I'm too full o' laugh!' and he grinned jes like you see him now. So it's him that's caught, 'cause he warn't willin' to help a fellow-creetur in need," moralized Uncle Tom.

"But now, young ladies, thar's some things to be b'lieved only in part, and thar's some things is to be b'lieved intirely. And when I go to git that mizzletoe off the great oak tree in the Tarleton wood—"

"Yes, Uncle Tom," interrupted Constance, rather hurriedly, "we shall be much obliged; and if you would please bring us some of the laurel too, and some"——

"Yes, yes, Miss Constance, certainly I will, and as I was a saying, when I go to the Tarleton wood"——

"It's all over with us, my dear!" said Constance, in a low voice, to her friend, who was listening with so much interest that Uncle Tom addressed his remarks entirely to her, though they seemed to have been intended for Constance. "Now, Heaven save the mark?" she continued. "Draw your fur more closely around you, for you will find it a comfort before we get back to the house."

"But maybe, Miss Evelyn, *you* don't know the reason that 'ere wood is called the Tarleton wood? Well," receiving an answer in the negative to his interrogation, "it's a long, long time since my ole, ole master, your great-grand-'pa, Miss Constance, was a settin' one day at the house; me and *my* master, his son, was young then, and *my* master was gone away to be a colonel.

"And so, ole master, he see Tarleton and his troop o' red coats a comin' up to the house. He warn't afeard o' nothin'

ole master warn't, 'For,' says he, 'I'm too old a man now for them to want anything with me, and I've seen too many Ingins to be 'fraid o' red coats.'

"So Tarleton comes up, and says, 'Sir,' says he to ole master, 'you'll order breakfast directly for me and my troop.'

"'Certainly,' says ole master, 'Tom, you tell 'em to git all that's wantin'.'

"So all hands turned out, and Tarleton and his officers they come in the house, and they waited and waited, but no breakfast come.

"'What's the reason we don't have breakfast, sir?' says Tarleton in a passion.

"'See for yourself, sir!' says ole master. And Tarleton went to the door, and see his troop at the kitchen a snatchin' and a pullin' everything, so as not a mouthful could git to the house. So he went out, and laid on 'em right and left, and cussed 'em up and down, and got his breakfast and rode off."

"Well," said Evelyn, beginning to sympathize in the apprehension of Constance as to the duration of the story, "but this does not explain the reason why the Tarleton wood received the name of the British commander."

"Yes, yes, Miss Evelyn, I'll come to that presently. Well, as I was a sayin', Tarleton and his troop rode off right through that wood; and they rode to your great-uncle's house, Miss Constance, and Mas' John, your great-uncle, was jest a settin' down to breakfast. Mas' John hadn't but one daughter, and a beautiful young lady she was, and she was jes married to a great gentleman, near kin to some lord, t'other side the water.

"So says Sam, that waited on 'em, says he to Mas' John, a makin' his best bow, Sam was allays perlitte, 'Master, says he, 'thar's some red coats a comin' up the porch steps!'

"'The deuce thar' is!' says Mas' John, for he did sometimes swar' jest a very little, when he hadn't time to think. 'rank!' says he to his new son-in-law, 'save yourself, boy!' so the young man jumped through the window, d run down the garden. But behold! one o' them red jumped through the window arter him, and laughed twas the best joke in the world.

"Hello!" says he, 'stop, cousin Frank, says he, 'stop! t'outh while to run,' says he, 'you know, I allays *could* un you,' so he caught him afore you could say Jack ins on."

"And what became of the beautiful lady, his bride?" inquired Evelyn, who found this part of the story better worth her attention than the beginning.

"Oh, they only made him what they called a prisoner on parol, or some such outlandish word. And things got straight again, arter a while, and *my* master come home; and right glad I was to see him, for he was allays good to me. When I was a lad he showed me how to read and write a little, and young ladies," here Uncle Tom drew himself up with a consequential air, "it's my opinion, that if the coloured people had the same opportunity of reproving themselves that the white people have, they would be quite as illiterate."

He waited a few minutes to watch the effect of this piece of oratory upon his fair auditors, but seeing nothing more than two pairs of roguish eyes, the rest of the features being quite concealed by the sudden application to them of two white pocket handkerchiefs, again took up the thread of his narrative.

"Well," *my* master says to me one day, 'Tom,' says he, 'wouldn't you like to be free?' 'Yes, sir,' says I, 'I would *that*' (with an emphasis on the word). 'Well,' says *my* master, 'I'll give you and your family your freedom.'

"So I was full of it, and I went to tell the good news to my Betty. My Betty allays looked fat and hearty, like she does now, but somehow, she never *did* make no great hand to work.

"So says I, 'Betty, master says he's guine to make us free!' thinkin' to please her might'y.

"'Humph!' says she, 'and what you guine do then, Tom?'

"Well, this posed me some, for I hadn't thought much 'bout it.

"'And what you guine do with me and the chillern, Tom? I hearn say free people has to wuk all day and wuk all night, and don't make nothin' at that. What'll you do for such a big fire as that 'ere, and for them blankets,' (and she showed me a pile Mistis had jes sent her,) 'and for your bread and your bacon that comes every day, 'thout you knowin' whar' it comes from, like the Jews had thar' bread and thar' bacon sent to 'em in the wilder-ness; and your milk and your honey like them too, for thar's your bees in the garden. And your hen-us and your chaw o' baccur when you want it? I tell you what, Tom, if you listen to *my* racket, you'll let free 'lone.' And I did," said Uncle Tom.

"Your master then was the grandfather of Constance?" inquired Evelyn.

"Yes, Miss Evelyn, and the kind-heartedest and best man that ever lived, though he didn't live half long enough, and he died away from home too. I know'd it, and it was show'd to me in the spirit afore ever the news come," lowering his voice to a solemn and earnest tone that manifested the sincerity of his belief in the assertion. "Afore ever that bad news come, I had marked down the very day and the hour and the minnit my dear master died, for he was father, and brother, and everything else to me. I marked it all on the great stone under the big chestnut tree. And his young wife—she was a sweet lady—she soon died too, and they both lie side by side yonder," pointing to a distant grove of evergreen trees, "and it well-nigh broke my heart."

The old man brushed away a tear with the sleeve of his fustian coat, and without trusting his voice farther, busied himself in preparing to go on his errand for his young mistress. His visible and unaffected sorrow in thus awakening the memories of the past, called forth a sympathetic emotion in his young listeners, and the bright eyes, suffused with tears, glittered like diamonds. With pensive steps they retraced their way, and had made the entire circuit of the extensive lawn in front of the house before their ever-buoyant spirits had recovered their wonted elasticity.

CHAPTER III.

TWO HEROINES.

As the reader has been presented very unceremoniously to two of the most important personages in the list of our dramatic personæ, and has seen them only in the unbecoming disguise, or rather *disguise*, of comfortable security against the "grey influences" that might otherwise have "visited" their cheeks "too roughly," we shall take the perhaps unwarrantable liberty of following them to their "bower," as it has been styled in days of more poetic description. In plain prose, this "bower"—for it would be as needless to prepare two as to insist on building nests for a pair of turtle-doves—was neither more nor than a neat and comfortable apartment in the more *an-*portion of the building, and which always seemed to be a special attraction for the family.

This partiality was probably the effect of association and habit, though there was something attractive in the endless and apparently useless profusion of doors and windows, of corridors and stairways, and in the curiously carved cornices and panelled walls; the unusual breadth of the panels attesting the gigantic size of the primeval trees from which they had been fashioned.

The six windows of the "bower" of our "ladyes faire"—for it boasted of this rather unusual number—looked out, on three sides, on the prospect which has been already described. Happily the windows did not pretend to the giant proportions of the panels, as in such an event, the soft carpet and glowing fire heaped up on the hearth, and dispensing a comforting warmth and radiance, would not have availed to counteract their influence. But besides that these windows had the advantage of being somewhat smaller than modern taste would sanction, they were sheltered by their pretty curtains of white and rose, daintily assorted in materials and colour with the coverings of the delicate toilet tables, in the decoration of which the industry and skill of one of the turtles had been exercised to prove her appreciation of the honour done her by her friend in sharing her "bower."

The large bed and its snowy pillows attested the same care, by certain "inimitable little borders;" the alabaster vases filled with half-blown roses and camellias, and, best of all, a table covered with choice books, on the top of which lay the precious bible and prayer book of every-day use, gave in these distinguishing features a just idea of the occupants of the room.

As we shall not perhaps again enjoy an opportunity of seeing to such singular advantage the inmates of this favoured apartment, we shall for once, and once only, play the Asmodeus of *Le Sage*, though almost unwilling to confess that we have been guilty of such a clandestine intrusion on their unconscious innocence. But at the moment when the "*Boiteux*" afforded the revelation, their dinner toilettes were nearly completed, and our young beauties appeared in a costume altogether admissible in a fashionable assembly, except that a cloud of fleecy *tulle* had not been added to it. We have only one peculiar privilege,—that of seeing in their full luxuriance the rich tresses that fell unconfined over their fair shoulders and arms. As one was seated and the other standing, their respective heights cannot well be compared, but a transient glance would have given them nearly the same stature.

We have no fancy for heroines who are supposed to derive their charms from their extraordinary altitude, like those of the old-fashioned romances, who seem to have been selected as was the first Israelitish sovereign, for being a head and shoulders taller than other people. We shall content ourselves with saying that neither of ours was below, and not many inches above the height of "the statue that enchants the world." Like that most wonderful of all the glorious relics of classic Florence, a symmetry approaching perfection diminished the graceful outlines to the eye, and more than ever proved that beauty of person in woman, like that of her mind and heart, depends more upon perfect harmony than upon the predominance of any peculiar charm.

But let it not be supposed, because our heroines did not exceed the "middle stature," by which is probably meant that as many are below as above it, that they were specimens of a sort of *fade* mediocrity, as the *juste milieu* is sometimes interpreted. On the contrary, no pains had been spared to develop the excellencies nature had freely bestowed upon both, and the choice between them would seem to depend, as in that of a rose or a violet, a camellia or a carnation, not so much on their relative merits, as on the taste or the fancy of the connoisseur. The word *seem* has been purposely introduced, because the reader may perhaps have a preference, and we are unwilling to bias that opinion by any pretension to superior judgment.

Neither of them had numbered more than seventeen summers; not quite the age that Madame de Genlis has indicated as that of the perfection of womanly beauty.

In few words, Evelyn Walsingham might be presented as was Rose Bradwardine, "with a profusion of hair of paly gold, and a skin as white as the snow of her native mountains." But it would hardly be just to dispose thus summarily of hair that in its silken texture and glossy waves set off to marvellous advantage a complexion of as pure and exquisite a hue as that formed from the two competitors in Lora's garden, who reconciled their regal aspirations by reigning united in the cheek of the "fairest British fair." Her blue eyes mirrored a heart both kind and true, and her complexion might have been imagined an index to her transient character; for the slightest emotion sent the mantling red to her cheek, and often betrayed her inmost thoughts ere her lips gave them speech; yet it would have been a pity to deprive such lips of their office, for "coral and pearls" so often brought up from their ocean depths for a

similar comparison, can alone serve to complete our description of them.

In its fairness the complexion of Constance equalled that of her friend, but there was a difference in the shade, if what was so fair could be said to have a shade, and the bloom called up in her cheek by their recent healthful exercise resembled the faint carnation that gives to the interior of the conch shell its peculiar beauty. Nature had departed from her usual rules, and in one of those charming freaks in which she delights, had traced dark though delicately pencilled brows upon the pure forehead. The tresses that fell in graceful negligence over her snowy shoulders were of that brilliant Titian hue so justly admired, though a shade darker than those which distinguished the favourites of the great artist.

The colour of her eyes remained a mystery, for no one had ever thought of assigning any special colour to eyes whose constantly varying expression, now half hidden by the long silken lashes, now sparkling out in laughing brilliancy, changed every moment, as emotions of sensibility or playfulness held their alternate sway in her heart. The outline of her chiselled lip would have served a sculptor for a model, if he could have caught it, but at the appearance of any one of the little dimples that lurked in its corners, or a single smile revealing its pearly treasures, he would have thrown down his implements of art in despair of imitating anything so fairy-like and charming.

Her small fair hands were dexterously and busily occupied in braiding the golden locks of her companion into the simple but becoming Grecian knot, and she may be pardoned if her attention was not exclusively employed by her task. The mirror before which Evelyn was seated gave back the faces and forms of both, and if a complacent glance was now and then bestowed on her portion of so lovely a picture, who could blame her for some consciousness of "self-approving beauty?" But such glances were only momentary, and her attention was chiefly directed to her pleasing occupation, and to its effect on the fair image of her friend.

"What were you thinking of at that moment, Constance?" inquired Evelyn, as the busy fingers suspended their work, and a glance was directed exclusively to the reflection in the mirror of the bright lock held up nearly at arm's length.

"I was only thinking," replied Constance, resuming the braid, "*of a very pretty tableau we could make for one of*

our Christmas evenings. I should like you to personate Hope, as she is represented in the 'Ode to the Passions,' only that it would be in vain for us to choose the 'sweetest theme,' as you have to be silent; the 'soft responsive voice' would be out of place, and you would not even have the privilege of the 'enchancing smile,' as any smile, under such circumstances, would have rather a stereotyped appearance. But you might, with wonderful effect, 'wave' your 'golden hair,' if, in such motionless pantomime, to wave it would not be inadmissible."

"A pretty idea," returned Evelyn, "though it would look rather vain in me to figure alone in the canvas. I would rather, however, have my hair appear in those sentimental 'waves,' than in the classic 'tangles of Neæra's.' What a droll idea some of those worthy old poets must have entertained of their beautiful young damsels! The 'tangles of Neæra's hair' always gave me a shuddering sensation, for I could not help fancying mine reduced to a deplorable state, and half sacrificed in the operation of restoring it to some degree of order."

"I suppose," said Constance, laughing, "that the 'tangles' were to be 'smoothed' like 'the raven down of darkness,' and that they were to 'smile' in company, when the agreeable task was completed. *A propos*, I have now nearly finished this part of mine. But what would the venerable poet have thought, if he could have foreseen two saucy girls amusing themselves at his expense? His daughters, from their frightened expression, in the pictures we see of them, were, as in duty bound, rather more respectful."

"*Requiescat in pace!* as Dr. Fowler would say, my dear," returned Evelyn, "or as he would probably add, *revenons à nos moutons*. Let us return to our tableaux; I think I can devise"—

But the device, whatever it was, remained untold, for at that moment Evelyn started and clasped her hands, while the blood forsook her cheeks.

"My dear child!" exclaimed Constance, "is it possible I could have hurt you so cruelly? What is the matter?"

Evelyn made no reply, but rose hastily and ran to the window from which she had apparently seen some object of alarm. Constance followed, and for a moment shared her feeling, when she saw Wildair galloping furiously, with head erect, covered with foam, and the saddle turned on one side as if he might have thrown his rider and dragged him
he ground with his feet in the stirrups

It was but for a moment, however, that Constance lost her equanimity.

"Do not be alarmed, Evelyn," she said. "If you were more with us in the country, you would not attach such vital importance to Wildair's freak. I have more than one assurance that Vivian is safe. In the first place, he never was 'thrown' either at college or from a horse; in the next, the idea of a man and a horse entertaining any fears of each other, is one entirely unknown in this region; and lastly, you may have observed that the bridle is broken, a sure proof that the frolicksome horse was negligently fastened, while his rider was engaged with his gun, or in some other way, and took the opportunity of a scamper on his own account."

"Mammy," continued Constance, addressing, by this title, a personage who at that moment entered the room, "have you seen my brother?"

The person to whom this inquiry was addressed, was evidently one of the descendants of Ham; but as there is every variety of shade even among the indigenous African races, the complexion of this one was not sable, but of a dark Moorish hue. In stature she was very short, though her well-turned shoulders, a characteristic of her race, relieved this disadvantage. Her snowy muslin apron and collar were well contrasted with a dark dress, and the dress was not too long to conceal glimpses of a neat stocking, and the whole of a well burnished shoe. Her head was wreathed *à la créole*, with a Madras handkerchief of delicate but varied colours, arranged with a degree of skill that a Parisian coiffeur might have envied.

Her modest but assured demeanour denoted a person of no little consequence, for she was one of a long line of "mammys" who had descended in as regular a succession as the Plantagenets or the Tudors. No entreaties would have induced her to take a seat in the presence of her superiors, and she now stood with an air as respectful as if in the presence of royalty, while "the young lady," the visitor of her young mistress, was near her. Perhaps, on occasions of less ceremony, she might not have forgotten that Constance was once one of her "babies."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Mammy, "I have seen him; he's jes come with a strange gentleman. I heard him say to Master that he met with the gentleman down at the public road, and they walked up to the house together, and that was the reason the horse got away. I thought you might be skeered when you saw him running with the saddle on, and I came to tell you."

"We were a little frightened, when we first saw him," said Constance, more readily interpreting the word "*skeered*," than our reader will perhaps be able to do. "But who is the strange gentleman? Can it be Doctor Fowler?" she continued, addressing herself to Evelyn.

"Oh no, ma'am!" exclaimed Mammy, taking the inquiry to herself. "I've seen Doctor Fowler, and the gentleman isn't a bit like *him*. He's a young gentleman, and a very nice-looking gentleman, and I think I heard Master say he was an English gentleman and an officer."

"Captain Delamere! I am certain of it!" exclaimed Evelyn. "How fortunate that he should come at this propitious moment to assist in enlivening our circle! Not that it needs more than our noble selves to make it charming, but as your young party is only invited to come the day after to-morrow, we shall have all the more amusement in the interval."

"I did not know that you felt so special an interest in Captain Delamere, Evelyn," said Constance, the lurking dimples playing round her lip, and a comic glance beaming from her eye. "I am afraid if Vivian makes such a discovery he will hardly be able to do the honours with his usual grace. But while we are talking of them, they are probably waiting for us, so we have not time now for further conjectures."

CHAPTER IV.

ENGLISH MANNERS.

OUR first three chapters have "made to themselves wings," and flown by without giving us time to reflect that we have been entirely occupied with the introduction of the lesser lights of Avonmore, while the proprietor himself has not yet taken the position to which he is entitled.

A brief space only has elapsed since the occurrence of the few unimportant events that we have recorded, and they have all been embraced within the period of Mr. Melville's morning ride.

He would have been somewhat surprised if he had suspected that his name would ever have served "to point a moral, or adorn a tale;" but a character of real dignity, of great conviction, of superior elevation, is as necessary to the construction of a story, as is the firm prop to the delicate tendrils of the surrounding plants that enliven and

If Mr. Melville had been asked his opinion of the highest qualities requisite "to give assurance of a man," he would have answered, "Truth, Probity, and an earnest and fearless pursuit of the Right;" and these are precisely the qualities which in himself shone out with such peculiar lustre. But it must not be supposed because the word "earnest" has been twice used in portraying him, that we are about to present a solemn bore or a pragmatist cynic to our reader. Nothing can be further from our purpose, for in all the amenities of life Mr. Melville had succeeded in attaining the *right* as amiably and as perfectly as he had done in more serious pursuits.

He was not a vain man, for he regarded the four cardinal advantages of genius, birth, beauty, and inherited wealth, as gifts of Divine Providence, for which to be grateful, but of which no one has a right to be vain; and being content to preserve and develop the ample portion of these gifts bestowed on himself, he was not disposed to be uncharitable or even critical towards any on whom such blessings had been less freely lavished. To these advantages he added some common ones, that is, if common truth, common honesty, and common sense might not perhaps be classed with the most uncommon qualities in the world.

As we might have summed up the character of Mr. Melville in a single expressive word, by saying that he was "a gentleman," that of Mrs. Melville may be understood when she is presented as "a gentlewoman," an old-fashioned title, but one that has a more exact and extended signification than the modern and elegant one of "lady." Her best traits can hardly be called distinguishing, in an age, and especially in a country where the devoted wife, the watchful and tender mother, the sympathetic friend, the kind mistress, form the rule and not the exception. If she was adored by her husband, idolized by her children, loved and trusted by her friends, and venerated by her servants, she saw daily instances around her of the same womanly virtues. And she well knew that whatever influence she possessed was to be ascribed to that pure and unselfish sympathy which is ready at all times to make all sacrifices for the happiness and well-being of others.

Her heart was as young and tender as when it was first won, and alike in their joys or their sorrows her children flew to her arms for sympathy when they rejoiced, and for consolation when they wept. They and their young companions regarded her almost as one of themselves, and the *Christmas at Avonmore* was anticipated by them without

any apprehension of surveillance or restraint in their innocent pleasures.

Mr. and Mrs. Melville were seated in a parlour, the windows of which commanded a view of the extensive lawn in front of the house. One side of it gave entrance to a conservatory filled with tropical fruit trees and flowering plants, which were mingled in pleasing variety, and banished all ideas of winter. But the idea of winter was not unpleasantly recalled by the ample wood fire that sparkled and blazed as if in honour of "merry Christmas." A crimson carpet and curtains completed the comfortable effect of the room, and the open piano with an upright sheet of music on it, the books scattered on the tables, and the tapestry work left rather carelessly on a sofa, showed the favourite parlour.

A few choice flowers were carefully assorted in small vases on the tables, and but a few, for Mrs. Melville had restrained the fair pilfering fingers that would have transferred all her pet flowers to them. To compensate for this deficiency, the mirrors and the paintings had been plentifully decorated with wreaths of ivy and laurel, interspersed with branches of arbor-vitæ, holly and cedar, uniting in pleasing contrast their ornamental berries of blue and scarlet.

Mr. Melville was engaged in reading the newspapers just presented him as the result of his messenger's daily visit to the post-office, and Mrs. Melville had taken up one of the pieces of tapestry lying on the sofa, apparently with the intention of continuing the buds and blossoms that were glowing with mimic freshness on the canvas, when Vivian entered and presented "Captain Delamere."

The handsome young officer paid his compliments with the high-bred air that marks the English gentleman, and was received with a cordiality no less pleasing and distinguished; and as Captain Delamere and her son stood together before her, Mrs. Melville thought, and justly, that it would have been no easy matter to have found two nobler young men.

They were both tall and finely formed; both with the dark blue eyes, the chestnut hair, and fair complexion that distinguishes the Saxon even when separated by oceans and generations from the parent stock. But a soldier's life and some seniority of years had given their perfect finish to the form of the officer, while that of Vivian, though manly, lithe, and eminently graceful, suggested the idea that a few more years, in giving it more development, would enhance its grace.

The noble turn of the features and their general effect gave them a partial resemblance as seen by a superficial observer; but there was a depth of feeling and of latent thought in the eyes of the young student, and a sparkling brilliancy in his smile, that promised still increasing interest when time should fully unfold the treasures of mind and heart they indicated.

"We are most happy to welcome you here, Captain Delamere," said Mr. Melville, rising and shaking hands cordially with the young officer. "It gives me sincere pleasure to see that you have not forgotten us: and we esteem it no small compliment that you should come to us at so unpropitious a season."

"The seasons and their change' are hardly perceptible here," said Captain Delamere, glancing toward the conservatory, and bowing to Mrs. Melville, who acknowledged the implied courtesy with a smile. "Mrs. Melville and yourself must have certainly found the *elixir vitæ* in some fountain at the base of these mountains. You are both in finer health than when I last met with you."

"The *elixir vitæ*, which we should interpret as our pure air," said Mrs. Melville, "is heartily at your service, and it gratifies me to perceive that you are already so far recovered from the effects of the illness which you informed us had compelled you to seek a temporary relaxation from your duties in India."

"Yes, I am so far recovered," replied Captain Delamere, with a suppressed sigh, "that I have no farther reason for delaying my return. Since I have taken an extended survey of the western continent in my recent tour, I have been tempted to wish that I had selected the Canadian snows rather than the burning suns of the East, as the scene of my exile."

"You would not regard it as so good a theatre for the achievement of military glory, I hope," said Mr. Melville, smiling, "as in that case we should apprehend some belligerent purposes toward ourselves. But I trust that day is past, not soon to return. We have associations and friendships with the mother country that every visit we exchange serves to renew and strengthen."

"It has been some time," continued Mr. Melville, "since I was in England; but I have many reasons for recalling with pleasure the portion of my visit passed at the country seat of one of her noble sons in the vicinity of Exeter. It was on an occasion when I was one of many guests, and

having then seen but little of your society, I was naturally disposed to observe its distinguishing features. Conversation, especially at dinner, I remarked, was easy, cheerful, and animated, and I was particularly struck on this, as I have been on other occasions, with the well-bred modesty and quiet unobtrusive manners of the *élite* of the English nobility."

"I should certainly subscribe to the word *élite*," said Captain Delamere, "on which I observe you lay a peculiar and significant emphasis."

"It might not perhaps be quite consistent with the deference often observed without discrimination towards your nobles to dwell too long on that word," returned Mr. Melville. "But the noblemen present on this occasion were of superior rank, and were all highly intelligent and exceedingly well-informed men. And yet they seemed studiously to yield the *pas* both in conversation and the forms of social observance to their untitled neighbours. In this close contact of the different orders of which English society is composed, I observed that their intercourse was perfectly easy and familiar; and on the part of these noblemen a marked deference and apparent yielding of superiority to those less elevated in the scale of their conventional hierarchy."

"I can hardly be mistaken in your host, I think," said Captain Delamere. "I have often partaken of his hospitality."

"It would then be idle to give my impression of his residence," said Mr. Melville; "but it doubtless gives you pleasure to recall it; and as Mrs. Melville and Vivian have not seen it, you will pardon my enthusiasm if I recount some of its peculiar charms. The grounds, though simple, I found unsurpassed by any I had seen in England for nobleness and beauty. The house is situated at the base of a very high hill, clothed with magnificent forest trees, consisting of beech, oak, chestnut, and various kinds of fir, from among which the undergrowth is entirely removed and replaced with luxuriant grass; while smooth winding roads are constructed along its side in such a way as to afford at almost every step a new and charming point of view."

"An extensive park stretches over undulating and sloping grounds in front of the house, dotted over with noble trees,—oaks, elms, or cedars of Lebanon,—sometimes standing singly, sometimes in groups, and so disposed as to give the highest effect to the *natural* features of the landscape—a thing which is better understood in England than in any other country in the world."

"And the conservatory, and above all the chapel?" said Mrs. Melville, "for I have always considered that the highest ornament of a noble country seat."

"A fine conservatory," replied Mr. Melville, "is embraced within a smoothly shaven lawn, which is separated by a light iron railing from the park. The lawn is adorned with rustic vases of flowers here and there, and several gigantic trees, among them an immense tulip tree, presiding with druidical majesty over the scene. On the opposite side of the house is a flower garden arranged with exquisite taste, and is fully seen from the dining-room windows which descend to the floor. At some distance from the house on the same side, standing on a projection of the hill, is a beautiful chapel built by the proprietor for the use of his own family and that of the tenants and labourers upon his estate, and near it a school-house built like the chapel in the gothic style, and intended for the children of the neighbourhood, over which Lady A * * * * exercises a maternal supervision.

"All this assemblage of beautiful and noble objects," continued Mr. Melville, "set down in the bosom of a country, which by its variety of hill and dale and its red soil also bears so strong a resemblance to our own, suggested wishes and plans of improvement at home, which, though they may never be realized, it was yet pleasing to revolve in my mind while I had so perfect and charming a model before my eyes."

Captain Delamere was about to make a complimentary remark on the success that had already attended the efforts of his host to emulate so bright an example, when the young ladies made their appearance, and his compliments were naturally turned towards them.

Beaming with youth and health, and fresh from the toilette, it is impossible to imagine two lovelier creatures. Their dress, from a girlish fancy, was the same—simple, but arranged with the exquisite neatness and taste that always distinguishes the *lady* in the true sense of the word.

A silk dress of the becoming shade of blue, well known as the *bleu Louise*, was relieved around the open corsage and sleeves by fine Valenciennes lace, and gave a *souçon* of the white necks and arms, of which we have elsewhere taken the liberty of a surreptitious description, and which were brilliantly contrasted with the colour of the dress. A brooch and bracelet of blue enamel on gold, the only ornaments they wore, showed by their simplicity that the wearers had no wish "to share with art the triumphs of their eyes."

"I have recently had the pleasure of seeing your father, Miss Walsingham," said Captain Delamere, after gracefully paying his compliments to both the young ladies, "and I was very near having the honour of his company as a travelling companion. Mr. Reginald Villiers would also have been of our party, but he has rather unexpectedly embarked for Europe.

Evelyn returned her thanks for the intelligence, adding that she had recently received a letter from her father, in which these intentions had been mentioned to her.

"Mr. Villiers is then an acquaintance of yours, Captain Delamere?" inquired Constance.

Evelyn smiled. "Constance," she said, "assures me that I have had a romantic dream, of which Reginald is the hero, and insists that he is a *myth*."

"My proof of the assertion," replied Constance, "is that, though I have often heard of Mr. Reginald Villiers, I have never seen him, and that I have never seen any one who has seen him. Is not this sufficient to warrant my theory, Captain Delamere?"

"It is fortunate that you have given me a moment to consider my answer to your first inquiry, Miss Melville," said Captain Delamere, "as I am afraid I shall only confirm instead of dissipating your suspicions. I have the pleasure of being acquainted with Mr. Villiers only through a friend, but a friend who would soon dispel all your doubts by his enthusiastic praises of Mr. Villiers."

"So far then," said Constance, laughing, "my theory stands unimpeached."

"But Reginald is an acquaintance of Mr. Melville," said Evelyn, appealing to Vivian. "I am quite sure I have heard you speak of him."

"Certainly," replied Vivian, "I have often heard my college friend, Ainslie, mention him as the best student of the classics he knew."

"He was not then your own classmate?" inquired Captain Delamere.

"No, I knew him only by reputation. But Ainslie refers to him as to an oracle, and pronounces him such a miraculous being, that he may well be mistaken for a myth,—in short, a college youth who dares to be singularly good."

"No small praise, certainly," said Captain Delamere.

"But we have not yet refuted Miss Melville's theory. Suppose we were to inquire of Mr. and Mrs. Melville?"

"Willingly," returned Constance, to whom the proposition

was addressed. "Mamma, is Mr. Reginald Villiers an acquaintance of yours?"

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Melville.

"A brief but satisfactory reply," said Captain Delamere. "We have now to appeal to Mr. Melville as the only remaining member of our circle who has not yet been catechised."

"I was formerly well acquainted with the family of Mr. Villiers," said Mr. Melville, "but I do not know Reginald. He has grown up since that time, and I am happy to hear so favourable an account of him."

"My theory is completely established, as you perceive, Evelyn," said Constance. "Now promise me that you will have no more romantic dreams of mythical personages."

Dinner was at that moment announced, and Captain Delamere offered his arm to Mrs. Melville. Mr. Melville paid the same compliment to Evelyn, and Vivian, after they had passed, making a profound bow to Constance, which was reciprocated by as profound a mock courtesy on her side, playfully locked his arm in hers, and followed them.

The conversation in so small a party was, of course, general, and became more gay and lively as Captain Delamere experienced less and less of the restraint that is inevitably felt on the first introduction to a new scene, and a circle with whom there has not been previously any familiar acquaintance.

The meal was half over, when one of the attending servants presented a letter to Mr. Melville.

"I thought," he said, as he broke the seal, "that I had received all my missives this morning: but this one, I suppose, is something of special interest. I trust it does not require an immediate answer. If the testy poet were interrupted in the middle of dinner, I can easily appreciate his exclamation:

'Heavens! was I born for nothing but to write?
Has life no joys for me? Or, to be grave,
Have I no friend to serve,—no soul to save?'

"This letter, happily," continued Mr. Melville, "does not warn me that I was born for nothing but to write, as it demands no answer at all. It is only a note from Doctor Fowler, saying that, as he is on a visit in the neighbourhood, he will come soon to pass a day with us."

"Doctor Fowler?" said Mrs. Melville, very innocently and quietly, "Why, I thought he was dead."

"My dear!" ejaculated Mr. Melville, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"It was Mr. Fowler, and not the Doctor, of whom you heard the report, mamma," said Vivian; and as he spoke he cast a furtive glance at Constance. Constance looked slyly at Evelyn, who in turn met a comic look from Captain Delamere. All four pairs of the bright eyes were turned towards Mrs. Melville.

But the battery was as unsuccessful as was the bolt of Cupid, when his shaft fell harmless, and "the imperial votress passed on fancy free," for Mrs. Melville was at that moment watching the blue flame that quivered on the top of a remarkably nice plum pudding, and was waiting for the blaze to subside before it should be offered to her guests. She looked up, and instantly comprehending the meaning of the glances directed towards her, joined in the merry laugh raised at her expense.

"My dear children!" she exclaimed, "is it possible you could have supposed that I wish any harm to Doctor Fowler? I am sure nothing so uncharitable was farther from my intention. It is true we might have had the prospect of a visit that would have given me more pleasure, but the Doctor, as I remember him, is a very learned man, and I dare say, a very respectable person."

"Do you think he will stay long, papa?" inquired Constance, timidly.

"I rather hope not," said Mr. Melville in an absent manner, as if he were uttering his own reflections instead of answering the question, and he was in turn forced to join in the merriment on his side of the table.

"But the Doctor," he continued, "is really a very learned man, and if he would content himself with showing only his true colours instead of hoisting as many as a pirate sloop when pursued by a frigate, he would still be an interesting man."

"What, then, can have metamorphosed him so completely?" inquired Mrs. Melville, her question threatening to bring the laugh on her again.

"In early life," replied Mr. Melville, "he devoted himself to natural science and the ancient classics with eminent success; but after living some time as a confirmed old bachelor, he took a fancy for a young wife."

"And this then is the cause of the metamorphosis," said Evelyn. "We shall have to be very careful lest we captivate gentlemen, Constance."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Melville, gallantly, "there are some young ladies who captivate old gentlemen without such sinister designs or such dangerous consequences. But the fair helpmeet the Doctor selected was, as you may imagine, not the most eligible choice for him. He informs me that Mrs. Fowler and his daughter, Miss Kezia, will accompany him, so that you will have an opportunity of judging for yourself."

"Miss what!" said Constance and Evelyn in the same breath.

"Miss Kezia," said Mr. Melville. "Mrs. Fowler's name is Jemima, but she declared it entirely too old-fashioned for civilized society. The Doctor, with the characteristic admiration of antiquities which at that time distinguished him, pronounced his opinion in favour of the name of Karen-Happuch for this scion of his house, but contented himself at last with a compromise in the intermediate name of Kezia."

"I think, from what I have learned, Vivian," said Mrs. Melville, "that you will have to conceal all your recent acquisition of the ancient classics, as the Doctor now dislikes any allusion to them, and affects to despise them in honour of his modern and fashionable wife. He has renounced them, and now confines himself entirely to the modern tongues, which he heralds forth with surprising flourishes on all relevant and irrelevant occasions. He pretends also to be a worshipper of the fine arts and Graces, and it may be truly said, with regard to his new accomplishments, he understands as much of one as the other. But it is growing dark; shall we 'adjourn our session' to the parlour? I suppose the gentlemen will not care to banish us on such an unceremonious occasion."

The evening flew by merrily and pleasantly; and Captain Delamere, in answer to his request to be favoured with music, heard with no little surprise the union of two voices in the artistic compositions of Italy and Germany, as well as in the plaintive ballads of Ireland and Scotland, that would have been listened to with thrilling delight by the amateurs of a Parisian *salon*.

The day closed with family devotion, which was never, under any pretext, omitted. Happy the domestic circle united by this bond of sympathy and love! Happy those, who daily and nightly, according to an expressive, though quaint and homely phrase, thus "*hem* the mornings and evenings of the household, and so prevent them from raveling out."

CHAPTER V.

MODERN ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

THE church bell resounded sweetly through the clear frosty air on Christmas morning, and all hearts were ready to obey the welcome signal.

Constance and Evelyn, Vivian and Captain Delamere made up a *partie carrée* for the open carriage; Mr. and Mrs. Melville, with little Alice, more prudently sheltered themselves within the family coach.

"I hope we are not late," said Mr. Melville, looking at his watch; "our good pastor is always exact to a minute, and faithful to his motto of 'punctual ministers make a punctual congregation.' I wish all our clocks and watches kept time as perfectly as he does."

We cannot venture, as a distinguished author has recently done, to give the sermon of this particular occasion, though if we dared to do so, it would be by far the best part of our story. But the discourses of the pastor were the least part of his ministry, and we prefer giving some idea of his character.

The beautiful portrait of Goldsmith presents an ideal far more perfect than any our feeble pencil could delineate; but there were some traits in the modest excellence of our model which deserve to be recorded. To the excellencies traced by the poet, Mr. Bloomfield added a strength of purpose and an efficiency of action which could be derived alone from the highest source.

His anxieties were not for the wealthier portion of his flock, for in their comparatively simple mode of life, they were not exposed to the dangers of either "poverty or riches," the extremes so justly deprecated by the wise ruler of Israel. It was to the poor, and especially to the young, that his attention was chiefly directed. The children of his flock esteemed it a privilege to receive the instruction so regularly and diligently bestowed, and the poorest African looked up to him as a friend who could point him to the way of life.

This humble class, with all the warmth of affection and Oriental fervour of imagination that so readily lend themselves to the teaching of a superior mind, was his especial care; and the afternoon of every Sabbath day was scrupulously and regularly devoted to their instruction.

He was beloved even by the most thoughtless of the

younger part of his flock, for while he warned them faithfully, he indulged in no pragmatism where pious parents were competent to direct them. Yet even thoughtless youth had been known to sacrifice the "pernicious weed" and other still more dangerous indulgences when he earnestly represented them as destructive to the overstimulated mind of the student, and adding, by needless and unwarrantable expense, a still heavier burthen to some widowed mother who lived in penury to save her scanty pittance for the education of a darling son.

In his parochial duties, Mrs. Bloomfield was his best assistant, simply by relieving him of all the cares of his family, which, if they devolved upon him, would have checked or perhaps destroyed his usefulness. Her extreme modesty gave her an air of timidity that enhanced the interest she inspired when her real merit was known, for it was felt rather than seen, by its happy results.

The small parsonage was, under her guidance, a model of exquisite neatness and comfort. The porches with their sheltering vines, the roses and jasmine that clustered round her doors, embellished the more substantial evidences of her good management as seen in "kitchen, parlour, and hall." Her children were distinguished equally by their faultless but scrupulously plain attire and their unobtrusive manners. Every duty of a housewife was at her command, and the snowy linen and bands of the minister were always the work of her own hands. It was even said that her industry supplied the leather gloves with which his hands were protected, when engaged, as was his wont, in the culture of the small garden; "for those hands," she said, "merited this peculiar care, since they were, literally as well as figuratively, to dispense the bread of life."

It was no wonder that such a family should have been equally loved, respected, and sought by all who knew them, and they found a cordial welcome more frequently than they had leisure to avail themselves of it, in every home and in every heart.

On the return of the family of Avonmore and their visitors from church, Mr. Melville was met on the steps by Johnson who informed him that in his absence Dr. Fowler and his family had arrived.

"You have made them comfortable, I hope," said Mr Melville to him.

"Yes, sir; my mother," for Johnson, though the only son of Mammy, thought it inconsistent with his usual elegant

politeness to use the homely appellation bestowed on her by the family, "my mother has carried them to their rooms, sir, and I sent for the baggage."

"Carried them to their rooms, and sent for the baggage," repeated Vivian apart to Captain Delamere; "these words must sound strangely to you, in such use. Perhaps you will feel more inclined to apply the latter word to Miss Kezia, from my father's representation of the *paternal*."

Constance and Evelyn overheard him, and shook their muffs threateningly at him, as they tripped up the steps of the portico, and passed on to throw off their hats and furs. When they entered the parlour they were presented by Mr. Melville to the Doctor and his family, who were already there.

The Doctor was a tall, gaunt man, with a complexion like a winter apple that had been very completely frozen and then very completely thawed again. It was, in short, a miraculous assemblage of wrinkles that clustered around every feature, and especially about his small twinkling grey eyes, where they were magnified into "crows' feet." He wore an auburn wig, which was apparently placed very loosely on his head, for in animated conversation it was often pushed from one side to the other, so as to give no small variety to the depth and expression of his ample forehead. That it was indeed a wig, was put beyond a doubt by small patches of white hairs that seemed to take a malicious pleasure in peeping out, and, as it were, reproaching the hypocrisy of their more youthful and elegant neighbours. But, *en revanche*, and to please the taste of his younger consort, the Doctor had dyed his whiskers in a colour corresponding with the wig, though with so little precaution, that a streak of auburn was visible on the cheek beneath them, and the operation seemed to have given a tinge, judging from their peculiar colour, to the ends of his fingers in performing it.

Mrs. Fowler was a fat, jolly woman, short in stature, and with that convenient and nondescript colouring generally denominated *sandy*; with hair, eyes, skin, eyebrows, and eyelashes so perfectly assorted as to defy the most critical observer to detect a shade of difference. Her hair, which had the very great advantage of remaining young, because grey hairs are as imperceptible in it as in the coveted and admired *blonde cendrée*, was arranged, or rather drawn up to the top of her head, with fantastic curls in front that looked as if they had been combed down from a recent fit of insanity by "pouring oil on the waves."

Miss Kezia Fowler was the exact resemblance of her mother, only that in face and stature she was smaller and slighter. It was the difference of looking through the opposite ends of a magnifying glass.

They were attired in the same style, in different though equally ill-assorted colours. A profusion of tinsel, not over clean, gave them the air of having bestowed an unusual degree of attention to the toilette. A nice observer might have detected some symptoms of either haste or negligence in its completion, unless indeed the oriental *henné* tinge of the finger ends might be regarded as unusual attention to it. But this flattering explanation of the phenomenon was contradicted by dusky stockings, a slip-shod *chaussure*, and the unpardonable inequality of the upper and under skirts of the flimsy fabrics of which both dresses were composed.

As Constance and Evelyn entered the room they exchanged the usual civilities of introduction with the ladies of the Doctor's family, and the Doctor, after bestowing on them several pompous and elaborate bows, turned again to look at a picture that he was contemplating with affected interest.

"Who is the author of this picture?" said he, in Italian, to Vivian, who was standing near him, benignantly translating the question, which he supposed the young student would not otherwise comprehend.

"It is a copy, signor," replied Vivian quietly.

The Doctor opened his eyes.

"The colouring is bad, and it requires varnishing," again translated the Doctor, with more amiability in the explanation than politeness in the criticism of a favourite picture of his host.

"Pardon me, but I cannot agree with you, Doctor."

The countenance on which he turned his scrutinising glance remained unmoved.

"You speak a little German, perhaps, also?" said the Doctor, patronisingly, in that language, but supposing that here he would be secure from the dangers of either rivalry or criticism.

"A little," said Vivian, smiling.

"I shall not trust your little," said the surprised Doctor, relapsing into the vernacular, and beginning to fear that there might be some knowledge of art as well as languages in the quiet modest young man whom he had thought to overwhelm with a display of superior modern accomplishments.

Mrs. Fowler was engaged with equal success in her department. The Doctor had experienced no difficulty in cog

vincing his fair spouse that she possessed musical talents of the highest excellence, and inspiring her with the firm belief that she might have been a prima donna if her light had not been hidden under a bushel; for this comparison always occurred to her, when she considered the limited circle to which her genius was confined.

Miss Kezia shared these sentiments, but quite as much on her own account as her mother's, having an estimate equally high of her own powers. By degrees she approached the piano, and turned over the music in a manner that plainly indicated her anticipation of a request to display her talent. Politeness demanded the request from Constance, who quietly declined a preliminary song urged by Miss Kezia.

"Miss Melville is perhaps out of voice, Kezia," said Mrs. Fowler, rising from her seat; "but I think you have not so good an excuse, since I heard you yesterday practising that last pretty song of yours. Try it, and I will play the accompaniment, and sing it with you."

The song, after a few minutes' absence on the part of Miss Kezia, was produced, showing that, like a good soldier, she was always provided with ammunition, and ready to obey the orders of the commander at the slightest signal.

Mrs. Fowler seated herself at the piano, and took off her mittens; then removed several large bracelets from her arms; and next requested Miss Kezia to take especial care of the rings which she removed from her fingers, and which Miss Kezia secured by transferring them to her own. She then laid an embroidered handkerchief, not particularly white, on the piano, with a small smelling-bottle on the top of it, and a fan by the side of both. Taking a box from her pocket, which she said contained the finest lozenges in the world for the preservation of the voice, she requested that one of the gentlemen would have the goodness to provide her with a glass of water, which was placed by the side of her pocket-handkerchief, the box, the fan, and the smelling-bottle.

Her preparations thus happily completed, Mrs. Fowler began a voluntary prelude of interminable length, in which syncopes, staccatos, and chromatics, adagio, andante, and brillante, were all mingled together in a heterogeneous jumble, terminating in a tremendous crash. The intertwining voices that followed in the duo, Malibran would have described, as she did on a similar occasion, as the "screams of two tortured cats."

During the exhibition the Doctor had been standing

near, keeping time with a sheet of music rolled up, and uttering a soft "*bene!*" as the voices sunk to a lower cadence, or an encouraging "*brava!*" as they rose. Occasionally during the performance he added some notes of his own in a tenor that had as much connexion with the air and the time as "the cat and the fiddle" brought together in so interesting and unexpected a manner in the ancient nursery rhymes. The song finished, a repetition ensued of the syncopes, staccatos, and chromatics, the *adagio*, *andante*, and *brillante*, and a crash, still more tremendous than the first, concluded the performance.

The announcement of dinner was no small relief, and everybody breathed more freely as Mrs. Fowler resumed her rings and bracelets, and returned the pocket-handkerchief, box, fan, and smelling-bottle to her pocket.

The exercise of her voice had apparently contributed not a little to her appetite, which did honour to the good cheer of Christmas. Fish, flesh, and fowl, jellies, creams, ices, and fruits, all disappeared before her with marvellous celerity, and the Doctor performed his part in a duo on the occasion, with far more effect than in the musical entertainment with which the company had been previously favoured.

A slight shade was thrown over his enjoyment, however complete, by the recollection that he was threatened with a rival in his newly acquired studies and accomplishments. The renowned Doctor Fowler might one day be surpassed by a young man that nobody had yet heard of in the literary or the fashionable world. He could not repress a feeling of dislike toward Vivian, and revolved in his mind some projects of retaliation for the ridicule that he began to suspect Vivian of exercising toward him. His plan of attack was formed just as some of the fine white celery, elsewhere commended, was offered to him.

Helping himself to a plant of the celery, which was served with the bud and as large a portion of the root as was admissible in its delicate preparation for the table, he held it up, and said to Vivian, in Spanish, "Do you understand botany?"

"I have studied it according to the system of Linnæus," replied Vivian, smiling.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Doctor, in real enthusiasm at the discovery of this new accomplishment in his young rival, and seizing Vivian's hand, which he shook with unaffected goodnature. "Why, my young friend, is it possible

that you understand Spanish, as well as Italian and German? You will rival me some of these days, when you have studied as much. Only let me advise you not to lose too much time with the ancients, as I did."

"I shall be most happy to profit by your advice, Doctor," said Vivian, with more respect than he had hitherto manifested, and touched by this unexpected effusion of feeling, "but you must pardon me for differing with you in your opinion of the great masters of antiquity. I have spent too much of my young life in their society, to give them up for their descendants."

"Perhaps you may be right," said the Doctor, with a sigh of regret to the memory of his old friends and companions; "but the ladies, sir, the ladies, must be pleased, and we must cultivate the moderns in language and fashions before they can be won. Why, my dear fellow, I should never have been able to win a single smile from Mrs. Fowler without the aid of the fine arts and the modern tongues. Trust me, you will have to modernize your ideas before you can ever hope for success with the fair."

The Doctor was interrupted at this point by a group of merry little girls, with Alice at their head, who came flying into the dining parlour, and were soon appropriated by the lovers of innocent, happy faces around the table. All rational conversation was at an end, and every one joined in the childish glee that had usurped the reins of speech and action.

The company was soon broken up, and they all returned to the parlour. Alice was quickly busied with her little companions around a frolicsome kitten, a Christmas present from "Aunt Betty," and they were all peeping into a small paper box that contained the pretty little ground-squirrel "Uncle Tom" had given her, though, as he remarked at the time, "he knew she would only have the fun of seeing it run away."

The little group were consulting together on this interesting topic; and after the important when and where of the squirrel's liberation was decided, Alice placed the box in a corner of the sofa, and, with childish forgetfulness, left it there. She was soon earnestly engaged in tying a string to a bit of brown paper that was intended to represent a mouse.

While she was thus occupied, Mrs. Fowler, who had been making a tour of observation, paused on that side of the room, and as she had been looking for the most comfortable

place in which to establish herself after a luxurious dinner, selected the squirrel's, instead of the "poet's corner," and without a moment's hesitation plumped with fatal precision exactly on the paper box. A faint struggle—a feeble squeak ensued, and the poor little squirrel was no more!

"Oh, my squirrel!—my squirrel!" exclaimed Alice. "Ma'am, you sat down on my poor little squirrel! indeed you did!" argued Alice, as Mrs. Fowler seemed quite unwilling to vacate her well-chosen seat for so trifling a cause. But Alice and her young companions pulled at her dress with so little ceremony, that she was compelled to yield to their united entreaties. Her tardy compliance came too late,—the squirrel was quite gone.

"What made him die?" said poor little Alice, her rosy lip quivering, and her blue eyes filling with large tears that began to roll over her cheeks as the lifeless favourite was taken out of the box.

"He died a natural death,—the most natural death in the world, my dear," said the Doctor, "as you perceive that Mrs. Fowler sat down upon him. This squirrel," continued the Doctor, holding him up by the tail, while Alice gave a faint shriek and hid her face in her mother's lap, "this squirrel is undoubtedly the true *sciurus striatus*, though Buffon, in his '*Animaux dégénérés*,' might perhaps class him with the rat of Madagascar."

"It *isn't* a rat!" exclaimed Alice, indignantly, raising her head, and shaking back the golden ringlets that fell in a shower round her glowing cheeks.

Constance, whose warm and tender heart sympathized in the "first grief" of her sister, and in the indignation she felt at such cool contempt of her childish sorrow, was about to relieve the Doctor's hand of the unfortunate squirrel, when she suddenly changed her mind, and softly and quietly resumed her seat, hoping that she perceived an avenger of his wrongs advancing.

She was not mistaken. The kitten, which had been watching the Doctor's movements with a natural interest and curiosity, seemed to have made up her mind that Buffon's theory of *Animaux dégénérés* was correct, and that the Doctor was holding up to her view a rat of Madagascar, or a rat of Avonmore, which suited her taste and science quite as well. She had climbed up with cat-like caution on the back of the Doctor's chair, and seizing, as she thought, a propitious moment, made a spring to reach the squirrel. A sudden movement of surprise on the Doctor's side detected

her purpose, and, to save herself from a fall, she fastened her sharp claws in the back of his auburn wig; her weight, slight as it was, sufficed to displace it completely, and she fell to the ground with her unexpected prey, leaving the Doctor's shining crown perfectly revealed.

It was now Mrs. Fowler's turn to shriek, and her first impulse was to fly as fast as her corpulency would allow to the rescue of the deposed wig; but the kitten had so completely entangled her claws in the tresses, that kitten, wig, and all disappeared in a twinkling beneath a piece of furniture in the farthest corner of the room, leaving only an auburn lock and the end of her tail visible.

Mrs. Fowler was compelled to resort to the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, which she threw over the Doctor's bald head with a faint attempt to treat the matter as a joke; but both were glad to escape from the room until the mischief could be repaired. After much coaxing, puss was prevailed upon to relinquish the wig, with which Miss Kezia also retired.

Little Alice was consoled by a promise from Mammy to have the squirrel decently interred, and by another promise from Constance to write an epitaph upon it. Her grief was soon forgotten in the glories of the Christmas tree, and in the sweet interchange of love and love's gifts between her and her little friends.

After such a discomfiture, the Doctor seemed unwilling to prolong his stay, and his carriage was ordered for the next morning.

When the hour of departure arrived, Mr. Melville and Vivian attended him and his family to the door, and Vivian assisted the Doctor as well as the ladies into the carriage. The Doctor shook his hand warmly.

"I shall hope for your promised visit, my young friend," he said. "Beware of the ancients, and come and see me. *Guardi bene di non mancare.—Bos Dias!*"

"*Nol dimentichero,—vosso humilde criado?*" returned Vivian, with a bow and smile, waving his hand as the carriage drove off.

CHAPTER VI.

A CHRISTMAS PARTY.

THE departure of Dr. Fowler and his family gave no small relief to the younger members of the circle at Avonmore, for

they were in hourly anticipation of the arrival of the friends they had invited to participate in the festivities of the happy season. Their preparations for the comfort of their young guests were completed, the only preparations required, for the joyous springtide of early life alone suffices to float the pinnacle on the dancing billows, and its white sails need not even a freshening breeze, when it is freighted with mirth and music and love.

The house was soon filled, for party after party drove up after the Doctor took his leave, and all was welcome, congratulation, and joy.

It is often remarked by strangers who visit our shores, that in an assemblage of young girls on this side of the water, "ten out of every dozen are pretty," and it may be added, that in such a number one or more would be pronounced beautiful by the severest critic.

On the present occasion there was certainly no departure from the rule; and arrayed in their gay and elegant attire, tastefully adapted to the season, their smiling faces brilliant with life and hope, these fair ones were all so charming, that a parterre of the sweetest and loveliest flowers of every variety would offer a comparison too tame to give a just idea of the group.

They had all exercised some influence in the selection of the young cavaliers who favoured the party with their presence, as a council had been previously held for the purpose, and a correspondence as intricate as that which history attributes to the *cabal* of Charles the Second and the ministers of Louis Quatorze, though less diplomatic and certainly far more innocent, had been diligently carried on for several weeks among the members of the council on this important subject.

We shall not attempt a detailed account of the amusements or the conversation of several consecutive days that flew by as "on a dove's wing, unsoiled and swift, and of a silken sound."

It must not be supposed, from the merriment with which the old halls resounded, that it might be said of our young party in the words of the Vicar of Wakefield, and rather malicious words for so amiable a personage, that "what was wanting in wit was made up in laughter." On the contrary, if there was much laughter, there was wit to draw it forth, and the lively sally was always promptly met by the brilliant repartée.

Music was a never failing resource, and there were some

of this happy band who, as we have already affirmed, might have done honour by their superior talent to any society or to any salon.

The long evenings were the favourite time for their gayer amusements, and tableaux vivants, charades, and dialogues afforded a never-failing variety. But the latter, as they imagined, required more time and reflection in their composition and arrangement than they had leisure or patience to bestow on them, and a deputation was despatched to Mrs. Melville to put her ingenuity in requisition for the task of preparation. She was soon completely surrounded. Two of the deputies seated themselves on footstools before her, two were at the back of her chair, and she was imprisoned on either side. The siege was so regularly conducted, that a capitulation was inevitable.

"You have all more wit for the task you impose upon me than I possess," said Mrs. Melville, "for there is far more histrionic talent in your party than you imagine, though it has, perhaps, never been developed. Any one of you could contrive the outline of a dialogue that would serve to amuse you for half the evening, if filled up by good *improvisation*, such, as I am sure, there is genius enough assembled here to supply.

"Suppose, for example, we were to fancy a very pompous old gentleman as guardian to a beautiful young heiress; her wealth entirely under his control, unless he forfeits his guardianship by making love to her. She is living with an old maiden aunt, who is jealous of the charms of her lovely niece, and has, moreover, rather a penchant for the old guardian. The beautiful young heiress, of course, has a charming young lover, and the old maiden aunt, of course has a pert little waiting woman. The young lover naturally has one friend, and the young heiress has two. These will be quite enough for your *dramatis personæ*. Now let us imagine how they are to develop the story in the dialogues.

"The young lover and his friend may first appear, and give some explanation of the relations between the guardian and the heiress. This is quickly done, as the friend knows all about the conditions of the guardianship. They retire, and the old maiden aunt enters and seats herself by the table on which her niece has left her books and work-bag. The old lady makes disparaging remarks on her niece and her various accomplishments, contrasting them with her own superior merits. In pulling a piece of embroidery *from the work-bag*, a letter drops out. She seizes it, and

discovers, as may be supposed, that it is from the lover. She makes many threats to break up such a correspondence, but replaces the letter.

"At this point the lovely niece enters. The old lady ingeniously makes mischief by false representations of remarks made of the young lady by her lover, and departs triumphantly, leaving her niece in despair, with her face hid in her hands and her elbows on the table.

"In this attitude of despondency the lover finds her as he enters. He lays an officer's hat and sword on another table, and approaches. Of course, a lovers' quarrel ensues, but is speedily followed by explanations and a reconciliation, in token of which the lover may presume to kiss the hand of the heiress.

"Their very interesting conversation is interrupted by the little waiting-maid, who rushes in, and in great agitation, with many appropriate *malapropisms* announces as a visitor no other than the pompous old guardian. Escape is impossible, and the lover, after some preliminary remarks, is advised by the little waiting-maid to 'congeal himself behind the sofa,' and not to 'absquatulate' until she gives the signal.

"The guardian, after some premonitory raps with his gold-headed cane at the door, enters—grand, pompous, and profuse in old-fashioned compliments to his beautiful ward.

"The little waiting-maid tries in vain to persuade him that his visit was intended for the aunt, who is gone out, and she manifests great uneasiness at the position of affairs. The old guardian magnificently attends 'Mrs. Abigail' to the door and turns her out. In departing, she threatens, aside, to go and bring the two young ladies, the friends of the heiress, to break up this 'nice *reference*.'

"Meantime, the guardian seats himself near his lovely ward. She recedes. He edges a little nearer. She recedes again. He reproaches her coolness, and ends with a flou-
rishing declaration of love, which terminates in his falling stiffly on both knees before her.

"At this interesting juncture the little waiting-maid appears, accompanied by the two friends of the young lady. The guardian, with some difficulty, rises from his kneeling posture, with the aid of the sofa on which he had been previously seated.

"The two friends of the heiress are saucy girls, who pretend to take no notice of the guardian, while they fly up to his ward, embrace her with a profusion of pretty

compliments, and converse on the subject of a charming concert at Mrs. *Singwell's*. They give a specimen of the music, by singing one of the airs of the proposed concert *en duo*. The old guardian, in the meantime, is swelling with suppressed anger, which manifests itself in a haughty and sarcastic reply to a remark made to him by one of the friends, who banters him about the maiden aunt.

"Here the young lover sneezes behind the sofa. Everybody starts. The waiting-maid runs forward to explain that 'it was the cat that sneezed.' The heiress and her friends affect to be of the same opinion, and all call eagerly upon puss, who is supposed to be under the sofa. But the guardian is indignant at the attempted imposition, mimics them, and at the same moment spies out the officer's hat and sword, and inquires if the cat had worn those articles and left them there? One of the girls immediately undertakes to convince him that the officer's hat is a new-fashioned flower-pot she had just sent her friend, and the other, holding the sword upright in the hat, insists that it is only a prop for the flowers to grow upon.

"The guardian represses his rage, but, fearing to lose his dignity by a refutation of such absurdities, flies to the fire, and begins to stir it furiously. The girls and his ward surround him, entreating him to 'be calm'—'composed'—not to lose his temper."

"He then loses all patience; freely bestows the epithets of 'mischievous!'—'good-for-nothing!'—'baggages!'—and at every expletive gives a flourish of the tongs around their heads. At length he brings the tongs so nearly in contact with the head of his fair ward, that the lover flies from his hiding-place and arrests the guardian's arm.

"The guardian, still panting with rage, wishes to know 'to what fortunate circumstance they are indebted for the honour of the lover's company?'

"Explanations ensue. The lover's friend and the old aunt enter. The guardian is convicted of having made love to his ward, by which he forfeits all control over her and her estates. The heiress offers her aunt a noble dowry, and presents the hand of the aunt to the guardian, who, with this inducement, gallantly accepts it. The lover is, of course, made happy, and the piece is concluded."

"Capital!" exclaimed the deputies, all together. "But how are we to dispose of the characters in the piece?"

"Constance shall be the lovely heiress!" was the unanimous sentiment.

"I think I should succeed better as the old aunt," said Constance, "if you will allow me to choose my part."

"I enter my protest against any such arrangement," said Captain Delamere.

"Then Miss Walsingham will perhaps take the young heiress, and you will be the lover, Captain Delamere," said one of the deputies. "The officer's hat and sword point plainly to you."

A shade passed over Captain Delamere's handsome face. "You must pardon me," he said; "I cannot venture to represent such sentiments. A soldier and a wanderer as I am, I must be doomed to single blessedness. 'O, what have I to do with love!'" he added, more gaily. "I should prefer the part of the lover's friend."

"Why should not Vivian take the lover's part, then?" said Constance, with an arch glance at her brother; "and I will represent one of the friends of the young heiress. I think I have a song that can be introduced with charming effect, as the one to be produced at Mrs. Singwell's concert. Anna, you will take the other, will you not? that arrangement will suit exactly."

The proposition was received with acclamation, and so far the characters of the piece were disposed of.

"But you have not yet decided on the most important personage of all," said Mrs. Melville; "who is to represent the guardian, the hero of the piece?"

All eyes were immediately turned toward Mr. Melville. He was deeply engaged in reading a philosophical pamphlet he had that morning received by the post, and marking with his pencil the most striking passages, entirely abstracted from the mingled voices and merry laughter that surrounded him.

As quick as thought he was surrounded by the deputies, who alighted around him like a flock of wild pigeons,—at his feet, at the back of his large easy chair, and one perched on each of its arms.

"My dear Mr. Melville! my dear uncle! we have a request, a very particular request, indeed, to make; a favour to ask!"

"Ladies, I surrender at discretion," said Mr. Melville, putting down his pamphlet. "Pray what would you have?" he added, bestowing a gentle pat of encouragement on the shining heads below him, while he received in turn an encouraging kiss on each cheek from the pretty nieces perched on the arms of his chair.

"Why nothing in the world," said Anna, explaining the story which Mr. Melville had lost while absorbed in his pamphlet, "but that you will take the part of the guardian in our piece. Nobody can do it so well."

"My dear children," said Mr. Melville, "how can you ask me to do anything so absurd and undignified? Vivian will do quite as well, if you will only put a wig upon him."

"But Vivian has his part," expostulated Anna, "and nobody can be the guardian but your own dear self."

"Because you think I am old, and cross, and stiff, and pompous, eh?" said Mr. Melville. "Well, I consent to sacrifice my dignity at the shrine of Momus for once, but on one condition," he added, with a sly glance at Mrs. Melville.

"Any conditions shall be fulfilled. I promise that without scruple," said Anna.

"Then the condition I exact is, that Mrs. Melville shall take the part of the old maiden aunt. The story, as I understand it, ends by her union in the bands of Hymen with the old guardian; so the part will be particularly appropriate for her. On these terms alone, I give my consent to the arrangement."

Mrs. Melville in vain protested against the proceeding. She found that she had been caught in a net of her own weaving, and the meshes were so dexterously entwined about her, that a fly might have made its escape more easily from a spider's web. She yielded with a good grace, the more readily, because it gave her no trouble to personate an *ideal* of her own creation.

The rehearsal was next to be arranged.

"Miss Walsingham, we will resign this parlour to you and your cavalier," said Anna. "The rest of us can prepare our parts separately, until your interview with your guardian." And they all departed, leaving Vivian and Evelyn alone.

Evelyn sat for some minutes with her eyes turned on the paper on which her portion of the dialogue was written. Vivian held that which Anna had given him in his hand. His thoughts seemed far, very far from it. As he approached her, Evelyn's transparent cheek gradually assumed the deepening tinge of rose that diffuses itself at sunrise over the Alpine snow. She raised her blue eyes, and they met his. Oh, what a world of love was in the depths of those eyes!

But the mischievous Anna closed the door at that very moment, and it is impossible to say what was the actual result of the interview. When it was again opened, Vivian *was, according to his part of the programme, kissing the*

white hand Evelyn had abandoned to him, as her part required, in token of reconciliation after the lovers' quarrel in the piece.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHADE ON THE PICTURE.

A HIATUS must be imagined between the present chapter and our last, simply because the termination of any social *réunion* is never so agreeable as its beginning or its progress. We will therefore pass over many affectionate adieus, and often exacted and repeated promises of the young friends to continue an interchange of visits and correspondence.

Mr. Walsingham, whose visits, as Captain Delamere had explained to Evelyn, had been unexpectedly delayed, arrived on the last day of the festival, and was welcomed with enthusiasm by the family as well as his lovely daughter.

The intimate acquaintance and perfect confidence established between Mr. Walsingham and Mr. Melville needed no more substantial proof than the Christmas visit of Evelyn to Avonmore, for she was her father's darling, and the pride and delight of his existence.

A similarity of tastes, and still more of feeling united the two friends more closely. Both had seen much of the world, yet neither was worldly. They had only profited by their superior advantages to compare men and manners, to enlarge their sphere of action and of usefulness, and had learned to look indulgently on the narrow-mindedness of those who had been less favoured than themselves, and whose oblique vision could be made to look only in one direction.

They were equally indulgent in all the charities and amenities of life; and when his intercourse with the world brought him in contact with pompous arrogance or finical affectation, and even when all the bounds of good manners and good taste were exceeded in his presence, Mr. Walsingham was heard quietly to observe, "the man acted according to his light; he knew no better." In his dignified and elegant, but modest deportment, such persons would hardly have recognised a man who had been distinguished at the brilliant court of the first Napoleon, and received as an equal by the nobility of England.

Like Mr. Melville, Mr. Walsingham could not only forgive the playfulness of light-hearted youth, but encourage it by

his presence; and far from exercising any restraint over the young party, he had been an amused spectator of their innocent gaiety.

"I regret," he said to Mrs. Melville, when taking his leave, "that I came so late, and must depart so soon; but I was delayed by unforeseen events, and I must redeem my promise to Evelyn to show her something of the 'sunny South' at a season when the rigours of a northern clime render our own home less attractive. I remember well my enjoyment, on a former occasion, of the verdure of spring in the midst of magnolias and evergreen oaks, when I had left all at home covered with snow. You have the advantage of a shorter season of winter here; but the South, as we understand it, lies far beyond you."

"Your visit to us," said Mrs. Melville, "recalls the recollection of the regrets with which the reign of Henri Quatre,

'Qui commençait trop tard et trop tôt terminait,'

was commemorated. But we hope that, as it terminates under happier auspices than those which attended the French monarch, it will be renewed as soon as our spring returns."

Captain Delamere took his leave at the same time. His fine eyes glistened with sensibility as he paid his parting compliments; and though his words were few, they expressed with sincere and cordial feeling his gratification at the warm and hospitable reception he had met with at Avonmore.

After the revelation at the conclusion of the last chapter, our reader will not be surprised to learn that a short time only elapsed before Vivian discovered some weighty reason for following the same route that our travellers were pursuing; and the household of Avonmore was thus reduced to smaller dimensions than usual.

Mrs. Melville felt some solicitude, lest the calm that so suddenly succeeded the merry days passed with her young friends should exercise a depressing influence on the spirits of Constance.

"I can easily divine your thoughts, dear mamma," said Constance, one morning, when, in spite of the coldness of the day, a bright sunshine had tempted them to a rapid walk around the lawn. "I have seen you watching me with the tenderest solicitude ever since my young friends left me.

You think I miss them, and I confess I do. But as much as I love them and enjoy their society, I know that they are all going back to happy homes, and we hope to meet again before very long, so that there is nothing to grieve any of us."

"You are a sweet child," said Mrs. Melville, surprised into an expression that might have awakened some little feeling of vanity in her lovely daughter; "and your philosophical view of your past happiness and present limited enjoyments relieves the solicitude I really felt, and which you detected. Can you then be quite happy alone with me?"

"Happy!" replied Constance, laughing; "why, my dear mamma, I really think I am happier when alone with you than at any other time. You may not think it very flattering to your superior wisdom and experience, but I find nobody who sympathizes in all my thoughts and feelings as you do; and there is no one with whom I can converse so pleasantly."

"On the contrary, I am more flattered by your preference for my society than by any compliment the world could pay me," said Mrs. Melville, tenderly pressing the arm that was linked in hers. "I am most happy in the hope that you will always look upon me as a friend and companion."

"Of that you may be assured, dearest mother," replied Constance. "If I should ever have the misfortune to get into any difficulties, you may be certain that you will be my first confidante and adviser."

"Then I do not apprehend any difficulties," said Mrs. Melville; "for such a resolution is the best way to avoid them. The misfortunes of young people chiefly arise from a want of confidence in those who could be their best counselors. People, as they begin to grow old, look with coldness on the enthusiasm of youth, or feel unwilling to allow anything for their inexperience. Their anxiety to see their children all perfection leads them to be severe and censorious; a habit of sharp rebuke and cutting repartee is gradually formed, when gentleness and courtesy on both sides can alone bind those hearts together that, under other influences, are daily becoming more and more estranged."

"I cannot complain that this has been my lot," said Constance, looking up at her loved companion with a smile of confidence and affection. "You have always been tender and indulgent to me."

"Not always when you were a mischievous little fairy," said her mother, smiling in turn. "You have forgotten how severely I lectured you for sometimes playing the coquette."

terrible. And do you remember how I remonstrated with you one day when you invited a bashful young gentleman and an equally bashful young lady, who it was thought had rather a penchant for each other, to go into the parlour, telling the gentleman that papa wished to speak with him, and the lady that mamma desired an interview with her; and when in some agitation and wondering what this strange summons from so grave a quarter could mean, they met at the appointed hour, you shut the door on them, and ran away, calling the jest a *poisson d'avril*?

"And at another time you determined to punish a lady of our acquaintance who had a particularly acute sense of hearing, so acute indeed, that you always said she heard more than anybody else. When a young gentleman who was not previously acquainted with this lady, had a message from one of her friends to deliver to her, you informed him very demurely that the lady was extremely deaf, that he would have to approach her very near, and speak as loud as possible to make her hear. And as this voice of thunder was poured into her sensitive ear like a broadside, with what apparent terror she started from her seat, to the infinite amusement of a room full of young people, with whom she was not at all a favourite! Do you remember these and similar offences for which I used to lecture you?"

"But, mamma," said Constance, deprecatingly, though she could not help laughing at the recollection of the consternation her childish propensities had created, "you know I was then very young; but I confess you were right to put an end to such pranks, as they involved an aberration from the truth."

"You are older and wiser now, my daughter," said Mrs. Melville, "and there is no danger of lectures from me on any subject. But you will often have need of advice, and you may profit of my experience before you acquire your own. But there is Mammy waiting to speak to us. I hope Henny is better to-day, is she not?" said Mrs. Melville.

"No, ma'am," replied Mammy, "I'm afraid not, and she asked me just now if you would be so good as to come and see her."

Henny was the only surviving daughter of Mammy, and was naturally regarded by her mother and the family with peculiar interest, as her successor in due time to the honours of her position.

She would have been eminently worthy of the trust, for she possessed an unusual degree of intelligence, united with

a gentle and docile temper, and had eagerly profited by the advice and the teaching she had received. She was about the age of Constance, and had availed herself of the childish lessons of her young mistress to accomplish herself in reading. Mrs. Melville had made this discovery on one occasion when she was ill, and the little handmaiden, in a soft and musical voice, read a chapter in the Bible, having first modestly asked her permission. This heightened the interest already felt in her, and the child had grown up into a girl of sound principles, good dispositions, and deep religious impressions.

Mrs. Melville saw with concern that her health was gradually declining under the influence of a slow but fatal malady that had caused the early death of her father. For two years she had been watched over and attended with all the care that the best medical aid and ceaseless kindness could afford. But all seemed unavailing, and she had been for some months unable to leave her mother's cottage.

Mrs. Melville immediately granted her request, and, accompanied by Constance, she followed Mammy to her daughter's bedside.

Poor Henny was lying very quietly, as if asleep, and looked up feebly as Mrs. Melville and Constance approached. A ray of pleasure played on her dark face.

"It is very kind of you, ma'am, to come so soon, whenever I send to ask you," said she, "and Miss Constance too. I like might'y to see you both."

"Certainly we will come whenever you ask to see us, Henny; but you are better to-day, I hope; you seem very quiet."

"No, ma'am, I am no better," she replied. "I shall not be any better until I go home. But I am ready now when my Saviour calls, and I feel as if he would call me very soon."

"Is there anything you would like that we can do for you?" said Mrs. Melville.

Henny waited a moment, and then said, "Yes, ma'am, I should like to see Miss Alice once more."

Little Alice soon came, and the poor girl looked fixedly at her for some minutes.

"She looks like the angels I see in my dreams, ma'am," she said, and she kissed the little hand freely extended to her. "My dreams are a great comfort to me," she continued, still addressing herself to Mrs. Melville. "I often see angels all in white with shining wings and golden crowns, and

sometimes I see you among them. Last night I saw you as plainly as I see you now, and you were among those angels, and in a white shining garment, as they were."

Mrs. Melville could not trust her voice to speak for some moments. She then asked if Henny had any other request to make.

"Yes, ma'am, I should like to hear Miss Constance sing once more one of those sweet hymns you taught me when I was a little child in the Sunday-school."

The request was willingly complied with, and Henny said she had only one more wish,—that Mrs. Melville would read the verses beginning with "Let not your heart be troubled."

Ah, how many thorns have been removed from the pillow of the departing pilgrim of life's journey by those heavenly words!

Mr. Bloomfield readily came at Mrs. Melville's request to visit his humble parishioner.

"I have never," he said, "seen the evidences of a brighter and purer faith than are manifested in this poor girl. The 'wise and noble' might learn a lesson of true wisdom in her perfect and childlike confidence, and in the resignation and even the joy she expresses in the hope of entering into her rest."

Poor Henny died that night, and the family followed her to her last resting-place at the cemetery in the grove of ever-green trees. Many tears were shed over her early grave, and her mother was regarded with more kindness than ever, in consequence of the sympathy her affliction elicited.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRIDAL.

SPRING had returned; the balmy season that poets love to sing and artists to paint; when Nature puts on her freshest "robe of universal green," and new health and life are awakened by the "vernal airs breathing the smell of field and grove."

Happily there are some "flowers of paradise" yet unsung, for every clime has its peculiar graces at this fairest portion of the varied year. One of our own authors has justly and *beautifully* said that, "while every insignificant hill and *turbid stream* of classic Europe have been hallowed by the *visitations of the muse*, and contemplated with fond enthu-

siasm, our lofty mountains and noble rivers raise their majestic heads and roll their waters unheeded, because unsung." Our humble muse does not contemplate a range so extended, and would shrink from themes of such grandeur and magnificence. A scene of quiet loveliness is all that her unaspiring song would commemorate.

The same author mentions a peculiar feature of our grand indigenous forests, in a huge vine that had enclasped an oak, and entwined itself around the stately tree so completely that it might have been imagined "The lion of trees, perishing in the embraces of a vegetable boa."

This had not been the fate of any of the fine old oaks that composed the Tarleton wood at Avonmore, and whose giant arms, as we last saw them, were stretching out in bold relief against the wintry sky. They were now in all the pride of spring, and waving in graceful foliage. The vines had happily indulged in a salutary caprice in their attachments, and had clambered from tree to tree, forming festoons, and draperies, and leafy canopies, in every direction; and the air was laden with the rich perfume that exhaled from their tender blossoms.

The velvet green of the lawn was relieved by the "pendent shades" of the trees on either side of it; and the clustering flowers of the acacia, the chestnut, the catalpa, and the tulip tree, added the charm of renewed youth and beauty to their proud strength. Flowers of all hues, roses with and "without the thorn," were scattered in profuse luxuriance on every side, and one, hardly known to fame, hung its long emerald wreaths studded with bells, "blooming ambrosial" flowers of "vegetable gold," and sending an unseen cloud of oriental incense through the air.

It would seem pedantic to introduce a botanic reference for this comparatively unknown flower; but the "yellow jessamine," thus popularly but erroneously called in the region in which it flourishes, will be recognised by all who have seen this superb evergreen vine in its gorgeous bloom.

The garden, even in its homeliest features, shared in the charm of spring; and the squares and stripes, pranked out in gay blossoms of varied hues, and giving comfortable promise of their fruits in due season, were not without their attractions to the practical eye and sense.

The bees were busy with their useful labours, and disputed the calyx of the woodbine or honeysuckle with testy little humming-birds, that whirled and glanced their tiny wings with lightning quickness, like "atoms of the rainbow fluttering round," plunging their long slender beaks into the

depths of the flower bells, and sometimes impatiently tearing them if disappointed in the nectar they hoped to find within.

The groves and woods were vocal with the concert of birds, and, above all competition, rose the rich, clear song of the mocking-bird, mimicking all the rest, and with proud complacency surpassing them all by his own artistic skill.

The preceding day had been one of clouds and rain, but only a white vapour now floated in light masses through the blue ether, throwing a soft shade partially over the landscape, and then passing away, leaving it to the influence of unclouded sunshine.

Every leaf and flower was sparkling with diamond drops that trembled in the sunbeams, as if conscious that they were soon to be absorbed by the irresistible power of the sovereign to whom they owed allegiance.

The distant line of the horizon with its shadowy peaks, and the neighbouring mountains, now a mass of rich foliage, were clearly pencilled out, challenging the attention that might otherwise have been exclusively devoted to the nearer objects of interests in the scene.

Constance was standing at an open window, inhaling the fragrance and music that breathed their joyous spirit into her young heart, and pointing out to little Alice a contest among three rivals, a bee, a butterfly, and a humming-bird, for the honour of first appropriating a bell of the "yellow jessamine" that bloomed just beneath the window.

"Why, what silly little things you are!" exclaimed Alice, watching the combatants eagerly, and leaning forward to see the result of the contest; "there are twenty bells on that wreath, and you cannot be satisfied, without all of you having that one. You ought to be caught for being so naughty. May I catch that pretty little tiny bird, sister? Oh, what a beautiful breast he has! Just like a flame of fire! And his green head and back that shines so brightly in the sun! May I catch him?"

"If you can," replied Constance, laughing, and the joyous child spread out her little hand to snatch the prize; but the bird fluttered his gauzy wings with lightning quickness for a moment, and vanished, almost "ere she could point his place."

Alice next thought herself secure of the butterfly, and her fingers were almost closed on the tips of its downy wings, *but the first touch* warned him of his danger, and he followed *the retreat of the humming-bird.*

"I think you may go, Mr. Bee," said Alice, who had once had experience of a sting; "I think I shall let you off this time. You can take some honey to the hive, and I shall have it afterwards. But who is that coming up the lawn, sister?"

Constance looked, and looked again, more eagerly, as she perceived some one in the distance, but too far to recognise him. As he drew nearer, he seemed to be divided between a desire to approach the house, and the attractive influence of the surrounding objects; for he paused occasionally, and then walked rapidly forward, as if to regain the time he had lost by lingering on his way.

The doubt was soon dispelled—it was Vivian. Constance and Alice ran out to meet him.

"My own dear brother!" exclaimed Constance, as he clasped her in his arms, his fine face beaming with the most radiant of smiles, "I need not ask you to tell me your happiness. It is written in your eyes and in that smile. I need not ask you how your suit has prospered."

"Who told you anything about a *suit*, pray?" said Vivian, playfully affecting to misunderstand her allusion, and taking little Alice in his arms and devouring her with kisses. "Do you suppose that I have been occupied all this time in replenishing my wardrobe, that you ask about *suits*? How do you know that I have not been studying the ancients and moderns, the arts, and the graces, and music, with Doctor and Mrs. Fowler? Unless, indeed, all the secrets of the household have been divulged in my absence. You required my presence here to keep you all in order. I have no doubt Alice has needed the lessons of patience and forbearance that I often give her by my teasing, and you have forgotten all your Italian by this time. I fear the education of my pupils has all been going wrong. And my honoured parents, pray where are they?"

"Papa is taking his ride, and mamma—"

But Mrs. Melville at that moment appeared, and Vivian embraced her as heartily as he had his sisters. They all walked on in renewed happiness together.

"You received my letter, mother!"

"Not until this morning, my son; but we had guessed its contents before it was opened. It needed neither fairy nor 'ghost' to tell us what was so obvious before you left us. But 'allow me to congratulate you on the happy occasion,' as the pompous old guardian, who in part aided your cause, would say."

Vivian had seated himself on the steps of the portico with little Alice on his knee. As his mother spoke, she gently put back the glossy hair from his brow, and bestowed a maternal kiss upon it, while she added, more earnestly,—

"I congratulate you, my son. Evelyn is a lovely girl; and your own happiness secured, the sympathy of tastes and feelings between her family and our own is the best guarantee of our satisfaction. God bless you, my dear son!" and again she kissed the fair, manly brow.

The letter Vivian referred to had been received by that morning's post, while Mr. and Mrs. Melville were sitting in his study, and while Constance and Alice were engaged as we have seen them in inhaling the balmy air of spring, and watching the contest of the bee, the butterfly, and the humming-bird.

"That letter contains good news, I hope," said Mrs. Melville, who recognised the handwriting and address, and had observed that the letter was from Vivian and to herself. "When you have finished reading it, I think I may claim it," she added, with a smile.

Mr. Melville placed the letter in her hand. "It contains intelligence of importance," he said, "but you will probably be as little surprised as I am at the news it communicates."

Mrs. Melville read the letter. She appeared, as Mr. Melville had suggested, but little surprised at its contents.

"I believe we have all been anticipating the event announced to us in this letter," she said. "We may congratulate ourselves that Vivian's taste has found a direction so congenial with our own.

"Yes," returned Mr. Melville, "I trust that the oft-repeated saying, that 'the course of true love never did run smooth,' may be refuted in this instance; where two young persons are equal in every respect, where they have every advantage of nature, education, and principle, and where the parents on both sides are united by congenial tastes and sentiments, there can be little doubt of their happiness. Vivian is rather young, it is true; but that, it has been said, 'is a fault that will mend every day.'"

"Vivian is only a year younger than you were when you took the same important step," said Mrs. Melville, smiling; "for you were only twenty-three at that time, and I think we have agreed that we lost at least one year of happiness by the delay I imposed, in waiting until I should attain the respectable age of seventeen. Our experience has taught us," she added, more seriously, "that when young hearts are

united in bonds of love, firm faith, and sympathy of feeling and taste, they will prove, as ours have done,

'Hearts that the world in vain has tried,
And sorrow but more closely tied !'

She had been standing behind him, with her hand resting on his shoulder, while they read the letter together. He drew her gently to him, and imprinted a kiss on her matronly cheek.

"Such love, such faith, such sympathies have been ours," he said, "I trust Vivian and Evelyn will be as happy as we have been ; more than that I could not wish for them."

A moment of quiet thought ensued ; and Mrs. Melville apparently resumed a subject on which they were conversing when Vivian's letter was received.

"This event will then make no change in your arrangements for our contemplated visit to Europe in the autumn?" she said, interrogatively.

"No," replied Mr. Melville, "I could not change them if I would ; but Vivian and Evelyn can accompany us. A bridal tour is always in fashion, and the beau ideal of all that is gay and delightful to young ladies is a trip to Paris ; so that it will probably need no persuasion to induce them to be of our party. Vivian is just of the right age to profit by foreign travel, and his knowledge of the modern languages will greatly facilitate his improvement, and add to his pleasure."

"It will certainly be an advantage to have a home such as we may offer them, for a part of the time at least," said Mrs. Melville ; "and to a young man who marries an accomplished and amiable woman whose tastes coincide with his own, her society doubles the pleasure of all he enjoys, if Heaven favours the pair with good health, and a reasonable portion of what the world would call *good fortune*, as the special care of Divine Providence is too often called."

"Such a companion as you describe," said Mr. Melville, "would be no incumbrance even to an inexperienced traveller in these days of modern civilization. She might be an impediment to the ascent of Mont Blanc, or even a visit to the Pyramids. But the former I have always considered rather an idle ambition, and of the latter I have been content to take the accounts of travellers more enterprising than myself. These details, however, can be best settled when Vivian comes, and I have reason to expect him to-day. Perhaps I may meet him."

Mr. Melville departed on his morning ride, and Vivian arrived in his absence, as has been related.

Our young and romantic reader, on reviewing the last few pages, will probably exclaim, "What! is it possible that this elegant, handsome, high-souled young man, for whom we had imagined a thousand interesting adventures, is to be married before the volume is half-finished? Is he not to be deceived in the object of his adoration, to find himself 'crossed in hopeless love,' to discover that Evelyn is not herself, but somebody else—perhaps the daughter of a foreign prince, and that to attain her hand Vivian would have to be a prince, too!" well—he was in all but the name. And we hope to be pardoned for the novelty in a novel that permits everything to take a natural and quiet course.

Romance writers are often slyly reminded that the union of the hero and heroine of the piece has the same magical effect that the name of "*Jacky me nory's*" brother, in the classic rhymes in which this personage is commemorated, has upon the "*story*" he illustrates; and that, when this union takes place, "the story's done."

This is not wonderful, and it may be accounted for without the unamiable reason too often alleged, that the hero and heroine, when united, are less happy, less loving, or less romantic than before. It is only because their happiness then is too unalloyed, too "unchangingly bright" for a picture, where there must be shadows as well as sunshine to give it interest in the eyes of others. For themselves, this "long sunny lapse of a summer-day's light" is all they wish, nor is there danger that their love will ever "fall asleep in its sameness of splendour." They need no dark shadows with which to contrast their existence. It flows on like a gentle stream without a ripple on its wave, only deepened and widened by others that join it in its course, and they still flow on together until they are merged in the ocean of eternity.

If the reader is anxious to pass over the next three or four months, such a sentiment accords entirely with the feeling of Vivian, who saw the fresh young graces of spring matured into matronly summer, and summer fading into grey autumn with undisguised satisfaction.

During this period we must be content to leave the young couple unmolested, without taking the liberties of Asmodeus, which we should have been compelled to do, if we desired to witness any of the interviews of the lovers. The "*boiteux*" would have had a difficult task in taking off three

stories from the top of a noble mansion, before he could have enjoyed even a glimpse of the elegant and luxurious apartment in which they were seated, "conning their fairy lore" of possible and impossible happiness, and arranging their bright beautiful plans for their future life.

Castles in the air at last subsided into castles on the earth; and the happy appointed day arrived.

We should be suspected of borrowing from some fashionable journal of the time, if all the details of this memorable occasion were given—details so deeply interesting to those concerned, but perchance possessing rather less of interest to those who are not in immediate anticipation of such an event for themselves. But we may be permitted to express our admiration of the beautiful bride, who looked more beautiful than ever in her dress and veil of Brussels lace, the diamonds that rivalled her bright eyes, and the delicate wreath of mingled clematis and orange blossoms that rested lightly on her golden hair, and of the lovely group of white-robed *demoiselles d'honneur*, first of whom was Constance, claiming the sweet name of "sister," and looking, in her radiant happiness, as if her airy dress of silvery white was but a floating cloud on which a seraph rested.

How shall we descend from such ethereal visions to the more substantial touches in the picture? We may, indeed, rest a moment on the elegant young bridegroom, whose highest dream of personal vanity—though we are happy to say he had but little of this frailty—might have been realized by the whisper heard on every side, of "what a beautiful pair!" and for another moment on the handsome young bridesmen, with their white favours and superb bouquets of flowers, to be presented in due season to the ladies of their choice in the white-robed group. And yet another moment we might dwell upon the elegant company, and the enchanting union of music, light, and gaiety. Last of all, though not least to those who were sublunary enough to appreciate such accessories, the superb supper, the choice old wine laid aside for the occasion when the lovely bride was born,—the white and gilt boxes filled with wedding cake, curiously iced with appropriate devices, and piled up in the hall for all who wished to bear off mementoes of the bridal fête in departing.

All this, and much more, "is it not written in the chronicles" of the time? We must therefore pass on to events of equal importance in our story, though it would hardly be possible to dwell on one more interesting to those two of

our dramatis personæ who have, so far, been its hero and heroine.

An intimation has already been given that Mr. Melville had decided on going abroad soon after the bridal. It is not necessary to our story to know the exact reason that influenced him in this movement. A visit to Europe is so everyday an occurrence that it is needless to give any particular reason for it on the present occasion. Mr. Melville was a man of judgment, and his reasons and his actions may be safely left to his own wisdom and discretion.

Within a month after the union of Vivian and Evelyn Walsingham, Mr. Melville and his family, accompanied by the young bride and bridegroom, embarked for Europe.

A few days before their departure, Mrs. Melville paid a visit to Mammy's cottage. She respectfully rose and stood, as was always her wont, in the venerated presence of her mistress. The snowy apron and collar were now relieved upon a black dress, and the creole turban was replaced by a white cap. Mrs. Melville spoke to her kindly of the arrangements she had directed to be made to secure her comfort during the absence of the family.

The poor woman burst into tears. "I cannot *live* now, ma'am," she said, "if you and all the family go away. John-son has his wife and children, and he will like to stay and take care of your flowers, and the house, and everything; but *poor me!*" and she sobbed aloud. "If you could only jest let me go with you, ma'am!"

And Mammy went.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCENE CHANGES.

"AND I have loved thee, Ocean!" exclaimed the bard, whose brilliant genius has often illustrated this mighty theme.

But the curious reader of his poetic fancies will perceive that the charms he loves to dwell upon are to be found only in views of the ocean from the land. When the scene is sketched by the poet's master hand, even when he is actually embarked upon "the dark blue sea," when "the white sail is set" and "the glorious main expanding o'er the bow," he still fondly lingers on the "spires and strand retiring," and so proves demonstratively that he is not fairly out at sea. *His enthusiasm seems to decline as the land recedes, for his*

muse than dwells upon "the sorrows sailors find, coop'd in their winged sea-girt citadel," and on the joy they experience when on some "jocund morn" the land again appears, "and all is well."

So far the poet has the sympathy of all who can appreciate the surpassing beauty and majestic sublimity of the ocean. If its broad expanse can be seen either from a comfortable shelter on the land, or in a romantic walk on the silvery beach, while the breeze fans away the warm influences of a long summer day, then its varied charms may be fairly acknowledged. Whether like a "molten mirror" it spreads afar, the white sails gleaming on its surface unmoved by a breath, or when its brilliant waves are sparkling like sapphires in the sunbeams, or when, chafing in angry mood, the proud billows come booming against the iron-bound coast, dashing up a cloud of white spray as every successive wave gives its thundering peal, old Ocean is glorious. "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners!"

But when we are fairly out at sea, the magic vanishes, and there are few, if any, who have not at some period of a sea voyage found themselves ready to exclaim with another "older" if not a "better" poet, "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea, for an acre of barren ground!"

We will not torture our reader with all the details that render life, for the most part, at such a period, at best "but a waste of wearisome hours," even to those who are not positive sufferers; but pass gladly over all the discomforts, anxieties, and miseries, small and great, usually attendant on the *traversée*. Happy would it be for the voyager if he could avail himself of our fairy carpet, and find himself transported with as much celerity as we are about to transfer our travellers to the blissful moment that announced the first faint glimpse of the rocky coast, and bright fields beyond, of the Emerald Isle!

If the limits of our story allowed the privilege, we should be only too happy to follow our travellers step by step in their progress through the loveliest and most highly cultivated country in the world. With what pleasure we could accompany them in their visit to Eaton Hall, its mingled Italian and English beauties probably most admired because first seen of the aristocratic palaces of England, and join in the merriment raised at the expense of funny old Chester, with its rabbit-warren streets and quaint houses!

Then we should delight in rambling with them through

Wales, and pausing at old Conway Castle, "frowning o'er the foaming flood" that looks so placid just at that classic spot, as if smiling at the "noble rage" of the great bard.

And how pleased we should be again to penetrate the gloomy but beautiful mysteries of Warwick Castle, and to laugh at the wondrous legend of the doughty Guy and his dun cow; or to bask in the soft sunshine on the grassy mounds that now are almost all that is left of the half-fabulous splendours of Kenilworth.

Still less should we have time to pause at Richmond, lovely Richmond! and sail lazily up and down the Thames with the white-breasted swans who seem to be enjoying the scene at their leisure; and least of all could we venture into the labyrinthine mazes of boundless London. We dare not even look towards glorious old Westminster, lest we should be lost amid its Gothic aisles and arches, and become bewildered by the crowd of recollections rushing at once on the mind in connexion with it. All this, if described at length, would be betraying our indulgent reader into the perusal of a journal instead of a story.

It was precisely at Westminster Abbey, that all the journals of all the young travellers of Mr. Melville's party broke down, nor had they courage to resume them afterwards. Unfortunately for posterity, which might have been enriched by these valuable lucubrations, Mrs. Melville happened to refer to our gifted author, who has illustrated this noble subject with his pen; and a re-perusal of his beautiful "sketch" so far discouraged them, that the abbey and the journals were together abandoned in despair.

Still more willingly do we pass over the unenviable journey from London to Paris, the abominations encountered in crossing the Channel, which Boreas and Neptune seemed to have combined in using as a funnel for filling all their great Heidelberg tuns of seas and oceans, in a cockle-shell boat overloaded with armies of sick and wounded "land-lubbers," evidently making their first excursion to the great French capital, and tumbled about in heterogeneous heaps over the floors and deck above and below. All this we leave for chroniclers who have a fancy for such themes. We are willing to escape, and fly over the road from Boulogne-sur-mer to Paris as rapidly as did the party whose movements it is our duty to keep in sight.

The usual attending troubles of a first arrival and establishment in a great city awaited Mr. Melville and his family in the metropolis, and it was with no little satisfaction that

they found themselves, after encountering a reasonable share of those troubles, established in a handsome house in the most eligible portion of the Faubourg St. Germain.

It happened that one of those fine old palace-like hotels (it would be presumptuous to say to the reader that the finest private residences are distinguished by this title) had just been vacated by the Marquise de M., who, from being a lady of pleasure, had by a natural consequence become a lady of pain, and had retired to her château to revive her health as well as her declining fortunes, leaving her fine hotel in the "noble Faubourg" to be occupied by any stranger who was willing to pay for the honour of taking her place.

The hotel was of noble size, built in a hollow square, with a central court, and with a garden of considerable extent. The garden was attached to the portion of the building *au fond de la cour*, and it was for this reason that Mr. Melville and his family gave it their preference. The entrances were separate, and the different sides of the building as distinct as so many large houses in London or in any city in our own country would be. The only difference was that the whole hotel was served by the same Argus-eyed porter who kept watch and ward over the interests of his mistress, Madame la Marquise, and whose vocation it was to report to her that her garden was well kept, that her gilded salons were never profaned by burning any other fuel than the finest wood the *chantier* could supply, and that none but the most delicate wax lights were to be seen in her lustres. *Au reste*, the porter was honest and considerate, though like all others of his tribe he was jealous and irascible, and orders once given to him could never be reversed, even on the most important occasions.

The rooms were large and numerous, the disposition commodious, and the furniture elegant. The garden, though, at the season when Mr. Melville arrived, deprived of its summer beauties, gave an agreeable view even in its fading charms to the salons, and the walls that divided it from several others in its vicinity were all mantled with an impervious covering of ivy, rendering the boundaries invisible, and giving the whole together the effect of extensive grounds. A lady's merlin in one of the adjoining gardens was still celebrating every lingering ray of sunshine and every departing flower with his sweet though monotonous note, and a fountain plashed in a marble basin in the centre of the garden, as if to make an accompaniment to his solo.

Mrs. Melville had accomplished her wish of offering a home to Vivian and Evelyn, and at first they were disposed to avail themselves of it, and pass the winter beneath the roof which might now be called paternal. But the season was most propitious for their intended tour as well as a sojourn in a sunnier clime, and a proposition made to them to join an agreeable party, and divide the winter and spring between Rome and Florence, proved an irresistible temptation. Some "natural tears" were dropped as they departed, but the smiles soon resumed their place, while the happy young bride and bridegroom went on their joyous way, finding novelty and interest at every step, and the family they had left were consoled by the assurance of hearing often of them, and welcoming them back with the flowers and the summer birds.

Mr. Melville found absorbing occupation in various important pursuits, which, with the duties and pleasures of society, left him hardly time even to think with regret of the quiet retirement of his home.

A numerous circle of friends and acquaintance now claimed Mrs. Melville's time and attention, for Paris is the home of strangers, and the favourite resort of all who have means and time at command to expend in a foreign land. Everybody has some good reason for preferring Paris to any other city for a temporary residence. The young like it, because it is gay and brilliant; the old, because it is convenient and agreeable. The scientific find it the emporium of science,—it is the home of the arts and the graces;—half an hour on a spring day in the lovely garden of the Tuileries will explain why it is the delight of children, and a wag has mischievously said that "even clergymen like Paris, because there are so many naughty things there to preach against." One great advantage it certainly possesses over most cities for those who do not desire to waste all their precious moments in conventional frivolities,—there is no city where entire liberty for both good and evil is so complete for strangers, and it is vain for those who there blindly follow the lead of folly or vice to say that they have no alternative presented to their choice.

But the temptations to waste time, even to the most reasonable, are very great, and Mrs. Melville felt some anxiety lest her young daughter, who often found herself surrounded by companions of her own age, should lose the opportunity of cultivating to greater advantage the accomplishments in which she was already distinguished. Her

precious morning hours were therefore dedicated to the instructions of several masters ; and a lady eminently qualified for the delicate task, after much consideration, and when her unquestionable testimonials had been sought and received, was engaged to pass a few hours daily with Constance.

Madame Laval, the lady who assumed this duty, was young and handsome. Her pleasing figure, her simple but neat and even elegant toilette, her dark expressive eyes and frank cordial smile soon won the hearts of both her pupils, for little Alice claimed her place as one. In the character of her mind and heart she displayed, at the first glance, the open loyalty of her English father, and the warm enthusiasm of her Italian mother. But by a singular coincidence of circumstances she spoke neither of their languages ; and it was only her pure Parisian French that Constance availed herself of to perfect her own.

Madame Laval soon won the love and trust of all the family, and her daily visits were anticipated as a pleasant recreation rather than a season of study. Indeed, to talk was her chief vocation, and to catch the intonation of her musical voice was the best exercise of her young pupils. It is a matter of regret that her own pretty *tournaures de phrase* must necessarily be lost in our translation of them.

"You are not then acquainted with those very near neighbours of yours?" said Madame Laval to Constance one day, after they had passed through their usual recitations of Racine, and Boileau, and Lafontaine. "I am fortunate in having my pupils beneath the same roof, though in different houses. The Signorina Beatrice de Visconti is a charming young person. I hope you will one day become acquainted with her."

"That is then the name of the elegant young lady we met just within the porte-cochère when we returned from our early walk to the Tuileries yesterday?" inquired Constance.

"Yes," replied Madame Laval. "The Comte de Visconti, her father, has been here several years, and has just returned with his daughter from a sojourn of some months in his native city of Milan. It is a matter of surprise to his friends that he should leave a place where his noble name is so well known, to take up his residence in a city where he becomes only one of a crowd of strangers ; but Paris has its attractions for every class."

"Perhaps you might apply that criticism to more than one temporary resident of this enticing metropolis," said

Constance, smiling; "but as the signorina and her father are such very near neighbours of ours, I feel particularly interested in knowing something about them. If the gentleman who was with her yesterday is her father, he is a stately-looking man, certainly, but rather grim, is he not?"

"Oh, pray do not apply such a formidable word to the count," said Madame Laval, laughing. "His daughter would never forgive you if she were to hear it, for she is entirely devoted to him, and would resent the slightest intimation that he is anything less than an archangel. She submits to all his rules without once questioning their reason or end, and would as soon dream of any other impossibility as the failure of his unerring judgment. Perhaps you observed how pale she looked when we met her yesterday: I think she is too much confined, and that her health and spirits need recreation. It would be most fortunate for her if she could become acquainted with such a family as yours."

"This, perhaps, would not suit the taste of her father," said Constance; "but if it should accord with his wishes, from your account of the young lady, I should be most happy to relieve her solitude, and cultivate so charming an acquaintance."

"You could not have a more agreeable companion," said Madame Laval. "The signorina excels in the music of her native land, and she is gentle and accomplished. But she is very timid; a natural consequence of the restraints of her education, for she has seen nothing of the world, and her father is her beau-ideal of everything great and excellent that it contains."

"I will never call him grim again," said Constance, with enthusiasm. "I love her for this devotion: it proves a pure and noble nature. But has the signorina no mother?"

"Alas! no," replied Madame Laval. "She has no mother, and a mother's place is ill-supplied by an aunt who resides with the count. But she is a great invalid, and seldom even leaves her apartment. Her presence in the house is only a nominal protection for her fair niece, and this is one reason why the count excludes his daughter from the world so sedulously. In this metropolis a young lady may almost as well be in a convent as without a mother's protection."


The entrance of Mrs. Melville at that moment, attired for a morning drive and visits, reminded Madame Laval and her pupils that the hours of study and conversation had been transcended, and she paid her parting respects and took her leave.

The usual compliment of morning calls made on Mrs. Melville demanded a return of the civility she had received ; but the most important of these visits for the particular morning referred to was one to the Princesse de P——, as some days had elapsed since Mr. and Mrs. Melville had accepted a courtesy from her that demanded such an acknowledgment. This courtesy, a large and ceremonious dinner party, has not claimed special attention in our story, because few circumstances of peculiar interest attended it.

There was only one which deserves to be recorded, and which was afterwards recalled as an omen by all who were present on the occasion, as dreams often are when the vague and mysterious combinations of thought that produce them assume reality.

In the midst of the elegant entertainment, a triumph of the confectioner's art appeared in two large fabrics of exquisite and delicate workmanship, which were placed in front of the host and hostess. One of these represented a kingly palace, the other, a Gothic cathedral. Whether the warmth of the rooms had partially dissolved the icy foundation on which they rested, or whether a darker and more mysterious cause produced the symbolic result, cannot now be determined ; but as soon as the splendid fabrics were put in place, they trembled convulsively for a moment, and then suddenly fell, scattering the sparkling *débris* over the table, the ormolu ornaments, and the silver and gold plate with which the table was profusely decorated.

As it does not suit our present purpose to comment upon this catastrophe, which only excited a smile on the part of the amiable and refined host and hostess, and some pretty expressions of commiseration from their well-bred guests, we shall not pursue it farther, but return to Mrs. Melville and her daughter, who have been waiting in their chariot while we have detailed this circumstance, and until the footman could inquire if Madame la Princesse de P—— was at home and would receive that morning. The reply was affirmative, and the visitors were conducted through several salons to the farthest in the suite.

The room in which the lady received our visitors was elegant, but simple, giving, as the favourite morning room always does, the best idea of its occupant. Music, books, and flowers had each their appropriate places in it, and two lovely children were gambolling around their mother with a delight and confidence that showed a perfect understanding between them, and that her little ones were not “ ”

kept for show" on occasions when *la bonne mère* might be displayed to advantage.

She advanced with an unaffected and winning air of cordiality that at once touched the electric chain of sympathy, and the corner-stone of a true friendship was laid at that moment which lasted long beyond the limits of our story.

After the usual compliments were exchanged, the princess remarked that the court presentation, which had been the subject of a former conversation, had been delayed in consequence of mourning, but that obstacle being now removed, it would give her pleasure to be a chaperon on that occasion. "It is one of our old-fashioned rules," she added, with a smile, "to exclude youth and beauty as much as possible from our court, by denying admission to young ladies. But these barbarous rules are sometimes dispensed with, even with less potent reasons than those which admit the ladies Louise and Marie of Orleans, who are not more than sixteen; so I think it would not be an unpardonable offence if for once I should smuggle youth and beauty into the presence of our august sovereign," and she looked archly at Constance.

Constance was at that moment amusing herself with the children, who were near her. The little girl was apparently about three years old, her brother perhaps a year older. She had taken quiet possession of a chair which he affirmed to be his. "Monsieur," said the little lady, putting her head on one side with a knowing air, "do you ask me to get up? I am a lady and you are a gentleman. You know, in *society*," (a strong emphasis on the word,) "the ladies sit down, and the gentlemen stand up." Then changing her grave tone, she put out her tiny foot, and added, laughing, "There, sit upon that!" The merry boy took up the little foot and kissed it. "You shall have the chair and a kiss too," he said, "for being so clever." And he threw his arms around her neck.

Constance joined the laughing pair; and the freemasonry that unerringly guides children to those who sympathize in their innocence and guilelessness, soon gave her their confidence. The beautiful boy glided first to her side and then on her knee, and ended by placing his hands on her fresh fair cheeks on either side, and bestowing a hearty kiss on the rosebud lips between.

"Mamma is going to make us dance to-morrow," he said, in English, for his mother was unwilling that her children should lose her own loved tongue, and was happy when any occasion offered to practise them in it. "I hope you will come and dance with me. I would love it much. I assure you I do not dance too badly."

"You will pardon the French idioms in the English of Alphonse, I hope, Miss Melville," said the princess, smiling. "But I hope you will at least understand his request, and gratify us by acceding to it. We will promise not to make you dance as he has translated his *faire dancer*. I am about to give the children a *bal d'enfants*, and we shall be most happy if you will accept his invitation. We never separate parents and children on such occasions," she added to Mrs. Melville, "and I shall then hope, also, to make the acquaintance of your youngest daughter."

The invitation was as frankly accepted as given: and the princess, in answer to an inquiry on the subject, undertook "in merry mood" to show the style of the anticipated presentation.

"Alphonse, you are just in the middle of that side of the room," she said to the little boy. "Now you shall be the throne, and that large arm-chair at the end of the room shall represent the king."

Alphonse walked gravely to the large chair and seated himself in it with an air of command. "I prefer being the king," he said, "if you please, Madame la Princesse."

Everybody laughed at this, but the preference was accorded, and the princess, accompanied by her visitors, went through the ceremony, and were graciously received by his little Majesty, who, though not actually bearing on his "baby brow the round and top of sovereignty," looked at least noble and beautiful enough to be the grandson of a king.

The presence of Constance was again claimed, and her promise granted for the miniature ball; and the visitors departed, and finished their morning at home, as the drive and walk *au Bois de Boulogne*, which had been their favourite resource for exercise and fresh air, were now interdicted by excessive and increasing cold.

CHAPTER X.

A NOBLE ARTIST.

THE winter which had now set in will long be remembered in Paris as a season of almost unprecedented rigour and gloom. In this usually mild and pleasant climate it was marvellous to the "fur-clad Russ" to find himself in Siberian snows; to the inhabitants of warmer latitudes

who had derived their ideas of the sunny land of France from the poetic fancies often so brightly conjured up to gild the stern realities of life as well as of climates, it seemed passing strange to see the Seine a sheet of "thick-ribbed ice," and the gay Boulevards enclosed on either side by embankments of snow.

These embankments had arisen so suddenly and unexpectedly, that it was found not only impossible to remove them, but the increasing severity of the season continued to add to them, until the formidable barriers rose like fortifications, extending on either side of the wide street, and completely concealing the portion within the trees dedicated to foot-passengers from the more fortunate occupants of the central part. Here, notwithstanding these discouragements, the elegant chariots of the votaries of fashion might be seen; for a winter passed out of Paris and in a château in the country was an impossible idea, and there was perhaps more reason than usual for seeking in a crowded city some oblivion of the *saison morte*, which is always a ready excuse for all who prefer a city life in winter.

Bright young faces sometimes sparkled through the frost-work that speedily formed itself over the crystal transparency of the glasses around them, and were occasionally seen for a moment by the light of the lamps, that even during the day often shed their dim lustre amid the surrounding gloom. But more frequently might be observed among the slowly moving file features marked by lines of care and thought, to which a perpetual interruption in their onward progress gave no such pleasing or amiable expression. In the words of a princess of the reigning court, "such unprecedented efforts were made to please the people, that one was often kept waiting ten minutes in one's chariot to permit a huge omnibus to pass."

This outrage, so pathetically described by the Princesse de P——, did not seem, however, to disturb the equanimity of the pretty little *grisettes* and *soubrettes*, who tripped merrily on, and showed to the greatest advantage their neat costumes and dainty *chaussure*, which the condition of the streets gave an additional reason for displaying as much as possible. By these and other foot-passengers the clumsy public vehicles were from time to time arrested, and, accepting the assistance always gallantly tendered by the conducteur, they sprang gaily in, and added yet another to the smiling row of faces, and dashing array of many-coloured shawls and bright ribbons with which the vehicles were already decorated.

On one of these misty and comfortless evenings, when the lights that began to twinkle in the surrounding gloom reminded the hurrying passengers of the populous Rue Richelieu of the warm and well-lighted apartments to which many of them were hastening, the dense crowd found themselves arrested by one of these awkward machines, which received their united and hearty maledictions.

A chariot had drawn near the narrow side pavement, the hope of its solitary occupant being evidently to continue his rapid career, so unexpectedly checked, in spite of this obstacle. But the approach of vehicles on the other side, added to the increasing masses of foot-passengers, rendered it impossible to proceed, and the restive horses, irritated still more by the coachman's repeated warning of "gardez!" to the bustling throng, began to rear and plunge. Impatient of the delay, and apparently of the whole scene, their owner hastily checked the servants, and descending from his chariot, threw his furred cloak around him, and rapidly threaded the crowded and snow-encumbered streets.

He passed with equal rapidity through the Place du Caroual, and across the Pont Royal, and soon after found himself at the portal of his residence in the Faubourg St. Germain. The porter immediately responded to the authoritative sound of the bell, and its ponderous bronze door was respectfully thrown open to welcome the chilled and impatient occupant of the hotel. He entered the court, and, passing on one side, ascended a marble stairway and advanced through a number of large and elegantly furnished rooms to a smaller one at the extremity of the suite.

The door was closed, and it was with evident reluctance and hesitation that he laid his hand on it. Twice he made the effort, and as often, apparently forgetting his fatigue and impatience, he turned away and rapidly paced the apartments again.

But, noiseless as were his footsteps on the carpeted floor, they were heard by a watchful ear within, and a pair of wondrously lustrous dark eyes looked forth from the door that had been so carefully closed, and eagerly followed his retreating figure. By degrees a fair hand appeared, then a fairy foot, and when he turned to retrace his hesitating steps toward the door, the vision of beauty stood revealed before him.

"Beatrice!" he exclaimed, startled from his reverie by the lovely apparition, though he was well aware that she was within when he entered.

"Yes, it is Beatrice, your own Beatrice, my father," she replied, advancing toward him, and taking his passive hand. "But why do you linger here? Our studio is far more warm and delightful than these larger apartments, chilled as they are by the intense cold of this strange clime."

The father's lofty form involuntarily bent to return the caress of his daughter, and he permitted himself to be led into the retreat which, under other circumstances, would have been the first sought on his return after an absence of many hours. But his brow was now heavy with a load of care and perplexity that grew darker and deeper as he continued to muse; and he rose from his seat and paced the room.

"Beatrice!" he again exclaimed, but in a tone so sad that it reached the heart as well as the ear of the lovely being he addressed, and banished the smile with which she first met him, "we must bid adieu to the luxury in which we have indulged during our residence in this metropolis. As I anticipated, all has gone wrong at home; I have been so unfortunate as to give offence unwittingly in high places there, and I am deprived of my fair heritage, perhaps, for ever?"

"And is it this which clouds your brow, and makes you so sad?" replied Beatrice, who, with the thoughtlessness of youth, could imagine no greater evil than the absence of the smile which had ever been ready to meet her fond caress, "is this all? why, it will only give us a fair opportunity of realizing some of my brightest visions,—of displaying to an admiring world your splendid genius, of which it has been deprived solely by the pride of exalted rank and exuberant wealth. And, above all," she added, clasping his hand in her own, as she looked up in his face with an expression which only a father can appreciate, "may I not now have it in my power to prove my devotion, and so show not only by words but deeds, the depth of my affection and gratitude to you, my father, in sharing your reverses as I have enjoyed your prosperity!"

The father passed his hand tenderly over her fair brow. "Alas!" he said, "nurtured as you have been in the lap of luxury, how little do you know of the difficulties that await us! A daughter of the proud and noble house of Visconti left friendless and without resources in a foreign land,—compelled, perchance, to aid her father in some ignoble occupation, or, worse than all, to exhibit those graces and talents, so carefully fostered and highly prized, to the gaze of an unfeeling multitude,—and this for a scanty and precarious *subsistence*,—Beatrice! the thought is distraction."

He started from his seat and again wildly paced the room. Some moments of silence ensued, when he was arrested by the gentle tones of that loved voice, whose accents of music could at any moment calm the rising tide of passion within his breast. He looked into those dark eyes beaming with enthusiasm, and watched the changes of her expressive face with intense interest as she spoke. There was an air of dignity, firmness, and resolution in her aspect that surprised him. Hitherto he had regarded her only as the playful companion of his leisure moments, the loveliest flower of his rare collection, the model of his favourite art. Now she seemed transformed by some sudden and mysterious agency into an equal,—nay, a guide,—a counsellor.

"I have indeed been nurtured in the lap of luxury, my loved father," she said, "and have seen little of the unfeeling world of which you speak, thanks to the tender care that has watched over me, showing me only its brightest images, and strewing my path with flowers. But in this hard world there must be many noble hearts, and noble hearts and elevated minds cannot be steeled to such merit or blind to such genius as yours. The cloud that now obscures your fortunes will, I trust, pass away; but in the mean time I am willing, heartily willing, to sacrifice the luxuries to which I have been accustomed. Only banish that anxious and pained expression from your brow, smile on your own Beatrice as you did yesterday, when your last delicate touch completed this triumph of sculpture, and, however humble our habitation may be, I shall be more than content."

He permitted her to lead him gently to his favourite seat, and for a moment the cloud was dispelled as he looked upon the beautiful image of the lovelier reality before him. The implements of his art were beside him, and he involuntarily laid his hand on them. The touch appeared to throw a shuddering chill through his frame.

"No!" he exclaimed, "I cannot make such a sacrifice to Mammon. My destiny—," he paused, and seemed lost amid conflicting emotions.

"Alas! my dear father," said Beatrice, in a mournful tone, "that fearful word falls heavily on my heart. Victor Delorme dwells ceaselessly on it. Each time that I see him, his *fate*, his *destiny*, seems to occupy all his thoughts. Would it not be better to commit ourselves in word, as well as in deed, to the care and guidance of the only Power in which we can securely trust?"

She spoke so gently, so sweetly, that the reproach con-

veyed by her words seemed not unbecoming, even though addressed to a parent,

"Victor is a noble youth," said her father, happy, apparently, to find some less painful subject of reflection than the one his agitated spirit had dwelt upon. "I love him, for his mother, though he does not resemble her, was very dear to me, and you are her living image, Beatrice. You bear her name, and in all the poet's dream of Paradise, or even in his own Beatrice, he could not have imagined or portrayed a fairer image. True it is that our young kinsman is sometimes moody, and sometimes touched with the transcendentalism of the times, as well as other eccentricities, but these are only fancies of youth. They will pass away, and leave the bright ore more valuable when separated from the dross that momentarily obscures its lustre."

As he spoke the last words he rose and approached the door, where a hasty footstep was heard. Apparently the guest was not unexpected, for he threw it open as if to welcome a familiar friend. With an air of disappointment and haughty surprise, he drew up his tall form as he perceived a stranger, and one of unprepossessing aspect, before him.

"Monsieur le Comte will, I trust, pardon this intrusion."

The words were uttered in a slow and protracted manner, while the eyes of the speaker seemed to take a rapid inventory of all within the apartment, and rested at last on Beatrice, who shrunk with instinctive aversion from his gaze.

"Monsieur le Comte will remember that he desired me to call this evening at five o'clock."

"I have no recollection of any such appointment," replied the Comte de Visconti, yet more haughtily, and provoked at the assured manner of a man whom he had never before seen, and who had thus unwarrantably intruded with a pretended licence into his apartments. He hastily closed the door behind him, and laid his hand on the bell. The unwelcome visitor perceived that farther delay might lead to unpleasant consequences.

"Monsieur le Comte will pardon me," he said, with an air of humility, and hastily producing a letter. "I received this letter from one who requested me to deliver it punctually at five o'clock, and by a slight change in my commission I obtained entrance."

An expression of contempt marked the manner in which the missive was received after this avowal; but its contents were apparently of deep interest, for the Comte remained

standing in the spot where it was presented, until several closely written pages had been carefully examined.

"The letter demands no answer?" said the intruder interrogatively.

"None," was the laconic reply; and, with a low reverence, he withdrew.

"I regret now, my daughter," said the count, as he re-entered the room where Beatrice anxiously awaited him, "that I requested Victor Delorme to pass an hour here this evening, for I am well aware that his presence is less agreeable to you than to me. I shall be compelled to leave you, for I have received intelligence through this unprepossessing visitor which demands my immediate attention. How this man became possessed of a letter treating of matters so delicate and important, I do not know; but I must seek the writer without delay. I will therefore countermand the order I gave the porter for the admission of Victor, and——"

He was here unexpectedly interrupted. The doors of the adjoining apartment were thrown open, and the domestic announced "Monsieur Delorme." Beatrice looked imploringly at her father; but, after saluting his young kinsman with his wonted politeness, he said hastily, "My daughter, my engagement admits of no delay. I must therefore leave you; but I shall return within an hour," and, with a brief apology to his guest, he departed.

"May I hope that my visit is not unwelcome?" said Delorme, in rather a lofty tone, for his eagle glance had detected the expression with which Beatrice looked up to her father on his entrance. "Let me beg that I may not interrupt your pleasing studies, or, it may be, more pleasing meditations."

A bright blush rose in the cheek of Beatrice at the last words, for she knew, from the expressive glance that accompanied them, that more was meant than met the ear.

"My occupation this evening has been quite light enough even for your taste, Victor," she replied; "for I am well aware of your aversion to serious occupations for the gentler part of creation. I became deeply interested in a musical composition by one of my favourite authors, and I am sure some mistakes have been made in printing it. The patience it has demanded to copy it with such additions and subtractions as to make it what it was doubtless intended to be in the original, might claim even your sympathy."

"You deem this, then, a light occupation?" inquired D

lorme—"one which I should think heavier than the solution of an intricate mathematical problem; but such are the ideas of the age. Happy would it be for us if we could return to primeval days, when shepherdesses, arrayed in robes as verdant as the banks of wild thyme on which their flocks were browsing, or white as their fleecy locks, sang their sweet, untaught harmonies, without any other accompaniment than that of a rippling brook or the summer breeze."

"Your ideas are not expressed with your usual precision, Victor," said Beatrice, with an arch smile. "Am I to understand that the shepherdesses, arrayed in white or in verdant robes, uttered these untaught harmonies, or shall we ascribe them to the fleecy charge? I am inclined to the opinion that one would do nearly as well as the other, though I confess I am not a fair judge, as I have seen no shepherdesses very far from this gay capital, and heard no untaught harmonies except those of the Tyrolians, who sometimes figure in the salons here, but whose music, like their costume, loses its whole charm when separated from the romance of their splendid waterfalls and snow-capped mountains."

"Romance—waterfalls—snow-capped mountains," echoed Delorme. "You are now on your favourite themes, Beatrice, and mine also, though you often accuse me of insensibility to the beauties of nature——"

"You misunderstand me, Victor," interrupted Beatrice, who was slightly agitated by the manner in which his last words were spoken. "I only understand *nature* in a different sense from yours."

"Ah, Beatrice, how often shall I have to contest that point with you? My belief is far sweeter than your own: why should you not think, as I do, that, of those fresh fair flowers in your fairer hand, each one possesses a soul?"

"Because we have no warrant for such a belief," replied Beatrice, calmly; "nor would I involve myself in the mazes of a philosophy that may end in bewildering my judgment and confusing all perceptions of truth and principle. We cannot comprehend each other, Victor,—I am too simple, too childlike for you. Your ideas are too sublimated, too subtle for my humbler understanding. Suffer me, then, to retain the impressions received in my earliest years, and do not disturb the happy dreams, as you deem them, of childish innocence and faith."

She spoke almost imploringly, and her dark eyes glistened through the tears with which they were momentarily suffused.

"I would not deprive you of those sweet memories, Beatrice; I would only add to the happiness you derive from them. Why should you not, amid other pleasing thoughts, invest those beautiful gifts of nature with a hope of immortality? As they lie there beneath that hand of statue-like sympathy and grace, why should we not deem them alike animated by a divine spirit?"

As he spoke, he lightly touched the flowers, and then the white hand above them. Beatrice gently withdrew her hand. The movement was resisted, and the hand was clasped within his own.

She looked up with an expression of surprise and almost of alarm.

"Nay, Beatrice, do not be offended if I read some of the lines of fate written in this hand. Even if it were pledged to another, he could never attain the summit of his anticipated happiness. Your destiny is linked with mine. It may be that we shall fulfil this destiny in the palaces of kings. Empresses have ere this realized the dreams of glory dimly shadowed forth by those who saw not into futurity as I do. It is vain to contend with the decrees of fate. Beatrice—thou wilt yet be mine!"

The last words were uttered in a deep, low voice, strangely contrasting with the playful tones of the first part of their conversation. Beatrice endeavoured to withdraw her eyes from the steady, moveless look which met them. Calm and sad, those eyes were gazing in hers. As the spell-bound bird, she would have given worlds to fly, yet she spoke not—stirred not. As the pure marble image near her, she became statue-like, pale, and immovable.

A slight convulsive shudder passed over her frame as the sound of her father's approaching footstep in the adjoining room recalled her to herself. He entered, and the spell was broken. His own agitation was too great to permit him to remark that of his daughter, who, almost unobserved by him, quitted the apartment.

The agitation of the Comte de Visconti was not without cause. At the epoch referred to by our story, the dark elements of revolution, both in Italy and France, were already at work, and the subterranean mine was composed of materials unsuspected by its victims.

At this period the fortunes of men too high-souled to penetrate designs so far below them, were often gradually undermined by those who hoped to reap the spoils of princely estate, by accusing the nobleman to whom

belonged of treachery towards his own government, and the Comte de Visconti was marked as one of these victims. By the mysterious machinations of some unknown enemy his words had been perverted, his letters intercepted, and he found himself suddenly transported from the highest prosperity to the brink of ruin.

Some appearance of truth was afforded in these machinations by the conduct and conversation of a near relative of the count. The only surviving child of a youthful and wayward sister, whom he had loved with almost paternal fondness, and who had incurred the lasting displeasure of the rest of her family by an imprudent, and to them repulsive alliance, Victor Delorme exercised an influence over the mind of his kinsman of which he was himself unconscious. Forgetting the wild heedlessness with which this cherished companion of his earlier years had disregarded all his counsels, as well as the more sacred bonds of parental authority, Visconti remembered only her days of penitential sorrow, and the last touching words with which she confided her son to his protecting care.

The pledge then given had been nobly redeemed, for that child of her love had shared his warmest affection as well as his ample fortune. Perhaps to an indulgence too unlimited might have been ascribed the restless and uncurbed spirit which looked with contempt on all present happiness; and Victor Delorme passed hours, and days, and sleepless nights in the anticipation of events which, if "taken at the flood," were to lead him to the pinnacle of fortune.

He had friends, young, ardent and zealous friends, as well as innumerable satellites, for there was a strange fascination about him, that awed while it attracted. Quick, refined, and subtle, his mind was eagerly turned to every new theory of the day, however startling; and, with rare gifts of grace and eloquence, he found little difficulty in imparting his own ideas to those who came within the magical sphere of his influence. Beatrice, the gentle, inexperienced Beatrice, was the only being on whom he had in vain endeavoured to exercise this mysterious power. Years had passed away since she had been deprived of the guardian angel who had watched over the morning of her life; yet there were sweet and holy memories remaining—there were impressions made on that young, pure heart as ineffaceable as if they had been *engraved on adamant*; and these impressions were her only *shield against his refined subtleties*.

The relations of Delorme with his kinsman were naturally

of the most intimate character, and Beatrice had in childhood regarded him as a brother; but time passed on, and every added day brought new feelings and events. He saw her, almost without jealousy, promised to another, and the personal attractions and fine qualities of his rival only stimulated an ardent desire to supplant him. Those who were far more powerful had yielded to his influence; nor did he doubt for a moment that one so gentle, so timid, so self-distrusting would easily submit to his ascendancy.

But the obstacles thrown in his way by the quiet yet persevering resolution of Beatrice to avoid him, as far as possible, perplexed and embarrassed him, while his impatient temper could ill brook these symptoms of distrust on her part, which amounted almost to aversion. She rarely afforded him any opportunity of speaking to her except in the presence of her father; and he was betrayed suddenly, and, as he knew, prematurely, into the declaration of his sentiments toward her, by the temptation of an occurrence so rare as an unwitnessed interview with her.

How he reconciled the high ideas of honour, which he professed, with his determination to persuade her to a union with him, knowing, as he well did, the indignant surprise that the discovery of such a design would awaken in the breast of his kind and indulgent protector, it would be difficult to decide. Yet he formed this determination at the same moment that he professed a warm attachment to his rival, and with the certainty before him that the object of his blind passion would forfeit the favour and protection of her fond but proud and haughty parent, by a step so unwarrantable.

But to those whose *principles*, if they deserve the name, are warped by the vagaries of a fervid imagination, it is easy to surmount all difficulties; and to his "*destiny*" Victor Delorme blindly committed himself, in the belief (he might have thought it sincere) that this destiny would guide him in the path of rectitude as well as fortune.

To the influence of the same mysterious but irresistible destiny did he ascribe the impulses of his wayward temper, which often led him, against his better judgment, amid scenes dangerous alike to his fortunes and his character. The unsettled and feverish state of public sentiment afforded a wide scope for the wild imaginations of bold and youthful adventurers, and the doctrines of *la jeune France*, though ridiculed in the public journals, were secretly conspiring with other causes in laying the train that was soon to explode with fearful and startling effect.

Insensibly he found himself led on from a group of listening friends and admirers to enlarge the sphere of his attractive influence. He was sought, consulted, relied on. Schemes of government, which might have succeeded if men could have been converted into angels, were proposed for his consideration. The freedom with which such dangerous topics were openly discussed, naturally excited jealousy and alarm on the part of the ruling government; but the feeble attempts made to repress this licence, while they momentarily smothered the flame, only served to give it more deep and deadly power when it should burst forth with renewed life and vigour. But as yet all was tranquil in the metropolis as "the smooth surface of a summer sea."

CHAPTER XI.

A COURT AND A MINIATURE BALL.

As it is not our intention to lead our reader into the mazes of a historical novel, the period to which we refer being too near the present day to be invested with the romance afforded by the enchantment of distance, only three of the personages of the reigning court will be mentioned in the presentation which we have seen practised, in anticipation, in the salon of the Princesse de P——.

An event so brief and so unimportant to our story would not have been recorded, but that it was of some consequence, at the epoch referred to, as the beginning of a social career in the brilliant circles of the metropolis, and it might appear strange, to those acquainted with the customs of the time, to omit all notice of it.

A rapid drive of a few minutes sufficed to transport Mrs. Melville and her daughter to the Pavillon d'Horloge at the Palace of the Tuileries, where, with other ladies, they were ushered through files of liveried domestics and some well-armed guards—unnecessary precaution for such gentle visitors!—and conducted up the great stairway into an ante-room, where they were received by the Princesse de P——.

The ladies were as elegantly attired as the "mockery of woe" still worn by the court admitted, and the delicately fair complexion of Constance looked almost dazzling by the contrast with her black dress. The conch-shell tint of her cheek was heightened by the excitement of the novel scene

on which she was about to enter; and it is not possible to imagine a more beautiful young creature than she looked at that moment. The group assembled there, and unused to see such youth and loveliness awaiting an introduction to the sovereign, from whose presence custom had habitually excluded these graces, looked at her with a surprise and admiration that heightened still farther her embarrassment and her beauty; for the timidity she manifested had a peculiar charm in eyes accustomed to see only the *blasé* votaries of fashion.

"We shall be compelled to wait here," said the princess, in a low voice, as if afraid of being over-heard in the adjoining salon, "until the gentlemen who have preceded us pass into the apartments of the Dauphiness and the Duchesse de Berri. I hope my lessons have not been forgotten," she added, smiling, as she looked at Constance.

The folding doors were at that moment thrown open, and revealed a superb and brilliantly-lighted salon, at the extremity of which stood the sovereign, surrounded by the attending nobles of his court. The throne, with its regal decorations, was on the side of the room, as the princess had indicated in the rehearsal of the presentation made in her drawing-room.

A profound reverence, as the ladies entered the salon, was returned by a graceful salutation from the king. Another profound reverence made by the ladies, on advancing opposite the throne, was again acknowledged by as courteous a bow, and the last reverence was made when a near approach to majesty enabled the sovereign to say a few words of compliment to each of his fair guests.

The reception was marked by that elegant courtesy which distinguished the monarch, for even the enemies of Charles X. accorded him the attributes of the finished gentleman. A few minutes sufficed for these compliments, and the ladies glided through a side door near the king—an arrangement evidently made to allow those who were presented to pass out of the regal presence without turning their backs on royalty,—and they found themselves in the presence of the Duchesse de Berri and the Dauphiness.

It was difficult to realize so august a personage as the mother of the *enfants de France* in the little flaxen-haired duchess, who, with a robe of peasant brevity, was tripping about the room, displaying, with girlish coquetry, her only beauty, a pair of exquisitely-turned feet and ankles. These feet were immortalized in marble and bronze in shop-win-

dows and collections, and the originals were scrutinized by her visitors at the same moment that her eye-glass was levelled at their faces.

The Dauphiness sighed, as she looked on the lovely face and form of the blushing Constance. Alas! the ill-starred daughter of Marie Antoinette never lost her consciousness of the instability of all that is bright and beautiful—of all earthly grandeur and happiness. There she stood, in quiet dignity, but always with that deep shade of sadness on her brow. She looked as one to whom the stormy and fearful past presented nothing that the light of memory could gild, and on whom the lurid future gleamed only as the lightning through the portentous thunder-cloud.

The ceremony was brief, and the reception closed without farther incidents than those related. In separating, the Princesse de P—— again adverted to her miniature ball, for which all of the ladies were invited guests.

The brief space that intervened between the beginning of the social season and Lent (when even the fashionable world in all civilized countries pays respect to that time-honoured observance) crowded the gaiety that might have sufficed for a year into a few weeks, and the Princesse de P—— had been compelled to unite her *bal d'enfants* with the customary ceremony of her weekly reception. In consequence of this arrangement, there was a large number of persons present who came only to be amused spectators of the scene, without wishing, or expecting, farther than this, to participate in the enjoyments of the miniature company of which the ball was chiefly composed.

It was delightful to witness the elastic joyousness of these happy creatures. Graceful as young fawns, and with all the pretty little elegancies of manner that distinguish the most elegant nation in the world, dressed with exquisite taste, and crowned and garlanded with flowers, they looked as fresh and beautiful as those flowers. In a light more brilliant than that of day, surrounded by the luxury of palace-like apartments, and with the inspiring aid of a band of the choicest musicians, the buoyant groups moved “on wings and on tiptoe.”

Many of them were thoroughly instructed in the art of Terpsichore, and were models of finished grace. Other tiny dancers, as merry, though less accomplished, joined their hands in what they called the *petit rond*, and galloped round and round in delighted mirth; and if occasionally the leaders in another band of the gallopade made a *faux pas* and chanced

to stumble, as not unfrequently happened, those following in heedless gaiety behind fell over them, and the fun was redoubled by gleeful shouts and clapping of little hands.

It was impossible for any heart, however cold and worldly, not to feel some emotion of sympathy and pleasure while looking on such a scene. The grave statesman unbent his brow and threw aside for the moment the load of care that weighed on it; diplomatists exchanged more frank and cordial salutations than their wont, and even ladies of fashion forgot their engagements for other places where they might act their part instead of being only quiet and almost unobserved spectators.

Among the latter there was one lady, who had ensconced herself in the depths of a luxurious *bergère*, and, half sitting half reclining, looked carelessly through an opera-glass at the more distant parts of the charming picture. She was showily rather than tastefully attired, and a certain exaggeration of style in her appearance gave an indication of what she might be in character and sentiment. This lady was addressed as Madame de St. Clair by the princess, who, in passing her, paused a moment. The lady rose with some unwillingness from her downy seat, but she did rise, as politeness required, to receive the gracious salutation of her hostess.

"I do not perceive Mademoiselle de St. Clair here this evening," said the princess. "I hope she received our invitation."

The remark was made in English. The lady replied in good French, but with a slight English accent, and coloured as she said, "My daughter was much flattered by your very kind remembrance and invitation, madame, but I thought you might have forgotten that she is not quite young enough to profit by your amiable proposition."

"She is, then, in society?" inquired the princess.

"Oh, no! madame," replied the lady, quickly. "Nina is in reality a child. She is only fifteen; but she has grown so very tall and womanly that even those who know me best are becoming quite sceptical about her age."

The princess shrugged her fair shoulders almost imperceptibly, and passed on. She had seen the young daughter of Madame de St. Clair, and had been struck by her beauty. Indeed, the invitation on the present occasion, though it included the mother, was intended for the daughter. She suspected, and not without reason, that the worldly and fashionable mother could not bear the thought of a rival in

her daughter's charms, and that in her precocious growth and beauty, Nina would have been that rival. She could not have heard "sighs for a daughter, with unwounded ear."

Madame de St. Clair was one of those waifs on the ocean of fashion that had been brought from afar by the billows, and was resting on the edge of the beach, in apparent danger of being taken unwillingly back by the next ebb of the tide, or else remaining stationary until the light sparkling foam, that alone gave it beauty and interest among surrounding objects, should melt away beneath the sun, or be congealed by the grey frost of time. The sun and the frost had not yet come with burning heat and chilling blight to leave her desolate, as all are destined to be who are profoundly and invariably selfish, as she was.

Had she been fifteen years younger, Madame de St. Clair would have been precisely in the position best suited for the heroine of a French romance, where *la jeune veuve* is always the chosen favourite for that most important character among the dramatis personæ of the piece. But the charms of the splendid widow were too completely matured by these unlucky years, and it required all her tact and ingenuity to parry the advances of the dreaded monster, time. Her figure was rather too tall and thin for the *belle femme*, which she now aspired to be, but a pair of very bright black eyes, and hair of jet in which she took good care never to permit a line of silver to be perceived, with symmetrical and regularly arched eyebrows of the same raven hue, contrasted well with a complexion of creamy whiteness, which, though called sallow in the day by malicious people, with a little adventitious aid looked brilliant in the becoming light thrown over it from the lustrous of Parisian salons.

The tact and ingenuity that preserved her youthful appearance, had sufficed to introduce Madame de St. Clair to the beau monde; and besides the advantages of these qualities, she possessed the additional one of the golden key, which sometimes admits strange visitors in great places. Her wealth was on the same splendid scale with her dress, her complexion, and her pretensions; for old Mr. Sinclair, besides the favour of making her his wife, added the still greater favour of making her his widow in a few years after she had bartered her liberty for his gold. Madame de St. Clair, as she now called herself, desired the past to be obliterated; and, but for "one fatal remembrance," her enjoyment of her position would have been complete.

This "black shade" crossed her mind occasionally in the

thought of the tenure by which she held her ample jointure. The handsome widow had a daughter, and her lord had made a will in favour of that daughter. The old father, foreshadowing the future, had indulged his eccentric humour in declaring it to be his last will that his wife should have the enjoyment of his wealth until the marriage of his daughter, when the whole property should be transferred to his darling Nina, not doubting, as the will intimated, that the deep and mutual affection of persons in so tender a relation would prevent any difficulty from arising between the mother and daughter. As a farther security for this good understanding on both sides, the will declared that, if Nina should marry against her mother's consent, the whole property should revert to a distant relative of the testator.

These singular provisions were, happily for Madame de St. Clair, unknown to the world, and the secret was carefully kept from her daughter; but her ingenuity, subtle as it was, could not suffice to conceal them from certain witnesses, who were only silenced by large sums sent and received, from time to time, without word or comment.

The effect of the will was, as frequently happens, precisely the opposite of the testator's wish; but as our story will develop its consequences, we will not anticipate the result.

She had resumed her seat, and was levelling her glass at all that she deemed of any interest in the scene around her, when it fell upon an elegant young man, who had apparently just entered the room. His fine countenance beamed with an expression of benevolence, as he looked at the happy creatures engaged in their innocent sport, and he was so much occupied with them that he did not at once perceive the "nods and becks and wreathed smiles" which invited him to a nearer approach to Madame de St. Clair. At length she succeeded in attracting his attention, and by degrees, as the gracefully yielding throng permitted, he approached her.

"It has been quite an age since I have seen you," she said, offering him her hand. "The gay season is half over, and you have been losing everything. Where have you been all this time? We could not afford to spare a personage so important to us as Mr. Reginald Villiers."

This was said in French. As the princess had done, the young man seemed to take rather a malicious pleasure in replying in English.

"Mr. Reginald Villiers has not quite so exalted an opinion of his importance," he said, smiling, and passing over her question, in which, as he rightly supposed, she really felt

very little interest, "and, to judge of the past from the present, I should not imagine you had been very dull here. I have never been in a scene of more delightful gaiety. Only look at that lovely little 'three-years old' couple, which a mischievous boy is linking together with the same garland of flowers, and that *petit rond* of bright little faces and shining locks! What a pity it is that Rubens could not have had such models instead of making clumsy angels out of his own children!" And he continued to find new objects of admiration throughout the bands of little dancers.

"Yes, it is pretty enough," said Madame de St. Clair, with a suppressed yawn, "but this sort of thing soon becomes tiresome. I hate children—they make such an intolerable noise. It is impossible to have any rational conversation where they are."

"Hate children!" Mr. Reginald Villiers was too polite to repeat the words, but his expressive eyes did. They conveyed the thought of his warm ingenuous heart, and there was something very like disgust almost visible in them.

"Perhaps I ought not to have used quite so strong a word," said Madame de St. Clair, rather apologetically, "especially as it is fashionable now to play *la bonne mère*, as the princess and some other distinguished ladies are doing here to-night. *There is really a pretty child*," she added, as if to efface the unpleasant impression she had made, by endeavouring to assume some interest in the little dancers.

She pointed towards a lovely child of six years old, whose blue eyes and dimpled cheeks and golden ringlets we have seen before her appearance at the *bal d'enfants* of the *Princesse de P.* It was our own Alice.

At that moment the little Alphonse, who was master of the ceremonies, sprang forward, exclaiming, "Ah, my partner, you are then come at last!" And seizing Constance eagerly by both hands, he led her into the midst of the tiny circle. The position was a conspicuous one, as there was no other young lady near her, yet she was perfectly self-possessed, for she felt at home, surrounded by sympathetic innocence and loveliness, and she joined in the dance with graceful ease, her radiant, happy smile, like a joyous sunbeam, dispensing pleasure wherever it lighted.

Reginald looked at her with all his soul as well as his eyes. Was this the original of some portrait, of which he retained a vague recollection, or had he ever heard of some *one who resembled* this ideal of all he had ever imagined of *the beautiful—the happy—the true?*

"Who is that lovely creature?" he almost involuntarily exclaimed.

Madame de St. Clair levelled her eye-glass at Constance.

"It is doubtless the young Italian beauty of whom everybody has heard, but nobody has yet seen," she replied. "You observe the Comte de Visconti and his nephew, Monsieur Victor Delorme, are near her, and looking at her with evident admiration."

Reginald felt a chill of disappointment. The beautiful vision was still before him, but it had lost its most potent spell.

"It is singular," he said, almost soliloquizing. "It must be fancy, but I have some vague idea that I have seen that young lady before, and that she is not Italian."

"It must have been in a dream, then," said Madame de St. Clair, laughing, "for no one here has ever seen the Signorina Visconti before. With all your prepossessions in favour of the ladies you are so amiable as to call our *belles compatriotes*, you will never find any among our very young ladies to compare with this beautiful signorina. Look at her air, her style; every movement has the natural expressive grace of her classic land of Italy. Look at her faultless toilette:—that robe of pure transparent white, every fold in its right place, and fitting her round and slender waist to a charm; everything perfect, even to the delicate edge of lace and the single row of orient pearls, their whiteness blended and almost lost in the fairness of her neck. Look at the exquisite manner in which her fine hair is braided, with just enough of the blossoms of the eglantine to draw the eye by a natural transition from their colour to her cheek,—and tell me frankly if you have ever seen anything to compare with her among your compatriotes?"

The last part of her question was lost, for Reginald had followed the strong bent of his own thoughts and wishes, and before the remarks of Madame de St. Clair were concluded, he had moved forward in the direction of the supposed signorina.

It may easily be imagined that a spirited young man would not rest quite satisfied with such an indefinite assurance as that given by Madame de St. Clair of the identity of Reginald's beautiful dream with the Signorina Visconti. He was too much interested not to inquire more closely, and half an hour after Madame de St. Clair had given her very patriotic opinion on the merits of our ladies, she saw Reginald conversing with Constance, and a wonderful degree of frankness and unaffected cordiality seemed to characterize their

first introduction. The supposed signorina was replying with an arch smile to something Reginald had said to her, as Madame de St. Clair passed by them on her way out; and this circumstance, trifling as it was, sufficed completely to mystify her. She well knew that a young Italian lady, brought up in seclusion like that of a convent, would not dare to bestow a smile on any cavalier, especially one young, handsome, and a stranger.

But Reginald saw not the look of astonishment which Madame de St. Clair threw on him as she passed, nor did he see anything in the room, in the house, in the world, but the beautiful creature before him. He was already ages in love. He looked at those eyes beaming with a thousand bright happy thoughts; at that fair brow so placid and then so arch; at the fairy dimples around the chiselled lip; and each succeeding expression was more lovely than the last. Constance saw only an elegant young man of whom she had often heard, who was associated with all her pleasant remembrances of home, and whose fine expressive eyes were bent upon her with an admiration that a less keen perception would have found it difficult to misunderstand.

As Madame de St. Clair passed, they were speaking of home—of Vivian, of Evelyn; and the arch smile accompanied the confession, that Constance had until the present moment believed or affirmed Reginald was only a being of Evelyn's fancy, and had always contended that he was a *myth*.

CHAPTER XII.

REMINISCENCES FOR THE DILETTANTI.

THE Palais Royal, or the Palais National, or the Palais Impérial, as it is called by turns, at the period to which our story refers, was altogether different from what it has ever been since. The mere traveller, or the temporary sojourner in the great metropolis of France, regards the Palais Royal only as a curious collection of shops, where everything may be bargained for and bought, perhaps cheaper than elsewhere, because the articles so lavishly and ostentatiously displayed are generally of a more showy and less substantial quality than those of more regular establishments,—as the place where the *Trois Frères provençaux* hold their court, dispensing costly luxuries in all the delicacies in and

out of every season, indicated by the colossal fruits always displayed at the windows,—or they have seen it, until very recently, a place of *exposition publique* for anything to be exhibited, especially an annual show of enormous collections of pictures, each worse than the other, or if a few gems might be found among them, they appeared as would “two grains of wheat in a bushel of chaff.”

At the period of our narrative the Palais Royal was a magnificent ducal residence. Nominal royalty was at the Tuileries, the actual influence was at the Palais Royal. The Duke of Orleans, the wealthiest and most powerful subject in Europe, held his court, for such it might be called, at this princely palace, which it had been his pleasure and pride to adorn, and it was a palace to live in as well as to look at, for art had been exhausted in giving it every comfort as well as every luxury.

Envy was silenced by the conduct and deportment of his amiable consort and her lovely family, consisting of eight children, the eldest of whom was the Duc de Chartres, who had not attained his majority, but even at that youthful age giving, in his regal and gracious bearing, the indication of those amiable qualities that for a period, brief alas! made him the pride and darling of France. He was of a noble height; his clear blue eyes were expressive but calm, and the fairness of a complexion that might have been deemed effeminate was relieved by a small moustache, some shades darker than the chestnut brown of his hair.

The two princesses, Louise and Marie, we have already adverted to as among the few specimens of youth and beauty permitted to find their way into the court of the sovereign under the *ancien régime*; and their fair young faces among the aged courtier and time-faded or rouge-renewed beauties of the court, looked like roses surrounded by their attending thorns.

The sisters presented an entire contrast in person, though they were equally distinguished by the gentle graces of their manners. The elder, the Princess Louise, better known since as the Queen of Belgium, was a fair,—the fairest, blonde. Soft blue eyes and hair of the lightest shade of golden brown accorded well with her delicate beauty. Her rounded form showed to most advantage in her evening costume, which admitted of a display of her exquisitely fair neck, and shoulders, and arms.

The Princess Marie, whose talent in sculpture has rendered her one of the *celebrités* in that beautiful art, was, in colour-

ing and figure, the exact opposite of her Hebe sister. Her slight form was taller, her complexion paler and less fair, her hair dark, and her dark eyes, shaded by long black lashes, were timidly cast down, as if her thoughts were often far away from the gay and brilliant scenes by which she was surrounded.

The Princess Clementine was a beautiful child, with long flowing ringlets, a fine complexion, and an air that would have graced "the daughter of a hundred kings."

Of the Dukes Nemours, Joinville, D'Aumale and Montpensier, the world has since so often heard, that it would appear like recalling the remembrance of a dream to say that the first was a fair-haired youth, small in stature but noble in bearing; the second, a handsome dark-eyed boy, just preparing for his first marine expedition; and the two last named, sprightly children, who were encouraged in their visits to the drawing-room, to distribute rose-coloured programmes for a concert or pay their compliments, by the kindest and most indulgent of mothers.

Such was the family by whom the Duke and Duchess of Orleans were surrounded; and the bitterest enemies, the most captious friends, have together acknowledged that, if a model *par excellence* of the domestic virtues had been sought for, it would have been found in this noble family.

The position of the duke, at that period, was one for which the proudest monarch might advantageously have exchanged his royal state. Surrounded by everything, within and without, that could make life beautiful, honoured and caressed by all classes, the patron of the arts, and with a colossal revenue, increasing daily by judicious management, which enabled him to rescue genius from oblivion and poverty from despair, his influence was alike felt and seen by all. His court, for such it might be called, received daily accessions from different quarters; and he was accused, whether justly or unjustly politicians and historians must determine, of fostering a spirit of discontent and faction in the numerous satellites who revolved by thousands in his brilliant orbit.

Strangers were often honoured by the notice of the princely duke, for he remembered, with kindness and gratitude, that in a time when he had been an exile and a wanderer in a foreign land, he had been taken to many hearts and homes.

It was on the occasion of a large dinner party, to be succeeded by a concert, that Mr. and Mrs. Melville and their daughter were favoured by an invitation to the Palais Royal. Of the first part of the entertainment it would be super-

fluous to offer a description, as it may be imagined by putting together all the appliances of ormoulu ornaments of classic form and el Dorado brilliancy, heaps of massive and highly wrought gold and silver plate, the porcelain of Sèvres, the crystal of Bohemia, garlanded with flowers or crowned with Hesperian fruits; while all that the most dainty epicure could have demanded, in delicate viands or faultless wines, were proffered in unlimited profusion.

Perhaps no more suitable place may present itself for the observation that in a city which the gastronome finds his Sybaritic paradise, the most elaborate and splendid dinner ever given never exceeds the limit of an hour and a half. Let those imitators who torment their wearied guests with sittings of three and four mortal hours of painful *ennui* after appetite is satisfied and conversation exhausted, and who still persist in furnishing an interminable variety of untasted delicacies, served with funereal slowness, take a hint, if their eyes should ever chance to light on these pages.

The invitations for the concert which succeeded the dinner were numerous, and many strangers were happy in finding their names on the list of distinguished guests, for "there were giants in those days," and a concert was an event to be anticipated with no small pleasure.

Will the dilettanti believe that the illustrious names of Pasta, Sontag, and Malibran—Garcia, Lablache, Rubini, Santini, and, most wonderful of all, Paganini, were all contemporary and in the height of their glory at this precise period? Yet, if they will examine the musical records of the day, they will find that those distinguished votaries of the "heavenly maid," each name alone sufficing to fill a journal of art, sustained each other, and by their united genius produced results that the musical world never dreamed of before, and seems not likely, from present appearances, to realize again.

The delighted audience "held their breath to hear" the superb basso of the great Lablache (who had not then attained the obesity which afterwards made him almost as remarkable as his voice of musical thunder), united with the young pure soprano of Sontag.—And Malibran, in the pride of her youth and beauty, with a voice alternately clear and high as a mocking-bird, and sinking to the richest and deepest contralto, her dark eyes flashing with enthusiasm or shedding tears, real tears of tenderness, as she lost her own identity in the sentiments she expressed.—And Paganini,—

with his dark mysterious face, that looked as if he had just invoked some magical spirit,—now drawing from his wondrous violin strains of mirth that made the hearts around him dance with outbursting joy, and then reversing the instrument, reducing it to a single string, and letting loose the horse-hair of the bow until it floated like a cloud, bringing out from beneath it sounds that sometimes resembled the church organ, or, still more wonderful, electrifying the audience by a sound like the deep wail of a bereaved mother, or a song as soft as her gentle lullaby to a sleeping infant. But why tantalise the reader with such recollections? We will not indulge them farther.

It would be superfluous to say that the audience was charmed—enchanted—enthusiastic, and that at every interval the music allowed the gifted musicians received their rapturous plaudits, and from time to time the encouraging compliments of the princely host and hostess.

It was not necessary to be thoroughly skilled in music to understand and enjoy sounds that rivalled everything expressive and beautiful in nature as well as art; and a child of nature might have appreciated these great artists, as well as the amateurs and connoisseurs who were assembled on the occasion referred to.

There are few young people of our day, possessing the advantages of an elegant as well as solid education, who have not made the discovery that the study of music to some extent in early life, as well as that of drawing, may have an important influence on the career of the man. The “eloquent orator” has often been heard to regret that his ear and voice had not been trained in childhood, and the mechanician, who finds his fingers unable to obey the quick impulses of his fertile brain, sighs as he lays down the pencil with which he wished to trace some idea that promised him success and fortune.

Reginald Villiers was one of the audience at the concert, and one of those who had not held as nought the advantage of cultivating a taste for music. His object in his European tour had not been to kill time in idle frivolities or deeper dissipation, but to make every scene on which he entered, whether grave or gay, conducive to his improvement, mental or moral; and he entered on none that did not accord with the rational and manly course of conduct he had marked out as his chart. He was happy to avail himself of every favourable opportunity of studying the manners of the most elegant capital in the world, and profiting by that study as he

did by other advantages. But on the present occasion it must be confessed that he had another object in view, and that the pleasure he experienced in receiving an invitation to the concert was greatly enhanced by the hope of seeing again a face and form that had been interwoven with every thought since he had first seen them.

He had fortunately been placed opposite to Constance, instead of being near her, as the entertainment did not admit of conversation, and he could watch the varying expressions of her countenance as she sympathized in the strains of deep tenderness or joyous mirth. Only once the eyes of Constance met his, and he fancied that she blushed; but her attention was again riveted on the musicians, and she looked toward him no more.

The concert concluded, the company retired without the formality of a supper—an innovation as yet unknown. It would justly have been considered preposterous to offer so idle a compliment at ten or eleven o'clock to guests who had dined at six or seven.

Reginald joined Mr. Melville's party as they retreated to the ante-room where the carriages were announced. As may have been inferred from the interview of the preceding evening, which had awakened so much astonishment in Madame de St. Clair, he had already been presented.

"Is there time left to call on Mrs. Belmont?" inquired Mrs. Melville, after Reginald had paid his devoirs. "I have so often been compelled to decline her kind invitations lately, that I feel almost under an obligation at least to make her an apologetic visit of half an hour."

"It is not eleven yet," replied Reginald, looking at his watch, "and there would be time between this and the 'witching hour' for the half hour you propose to bestow on Mrs. Belmont. There might be some danger of leaving the glass slipper there," he added, with a smile, and glancing at Constance.

"But as only a young prince could find it," returned Constance, laughing, "there is no danger; for we are about to leave the only young princes I have ever seen, behind. I do not think the Duc de Chartres will honour Mrs. Belmont's soirée."

"Yet princes have been seen in stranger places," said Mr. Melville, "for if wealth and luxury constituted all that they court, Mr. Belmont might easily command their society. His establishment is next in those qualities to the palaces here."

Mr. Melville had not exaggerated the magnificence of Mr. Belmont's establishment, the interior of which, as well as its elaborately illuminated exterior, the party holding the consultation just recorded will soon see, as they determined on the visit of half an hour to Mrs. Belmont. But, leaving them a few minutes' time for the drive, which, as it was in the *Chaussée d'Antin*, then in some of its grand hotels beginning to rival the noble *Faubourg*, it will not take them long to accomplish, a brief sketch may meantime be given of the inmates of the one they are about to enter.

But Mr. Belmont and his family were people of too much consequence, at least in their own estimation, to be introduced at the end of a chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

"GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!"

MR. BELMONT could hardly call himself a citizen of any country, as he was, in the broadest meaning of the word, a cosmopolite, though he claimed affinity with many, and indeed he ought to have been grateful to all; for, far from finding the old adage true that "a rolling stone gathers no moss," he had gathered "moss," or, what he valued more, money, in every nation in which he had sojourned, until his wealth had become a proverb. He was fond of magnificence and show, though often penurious in the extreme where he ought to have been liberal. But such was his ardent desire for distinction among the great and fashionable in society, that he relinquished, almost without a sigh, his grasp upon the thousands daily required to support his splendid establishment.

Mrs. Belmont was a quiet and rather a melancholy-looking person, who seemed to be quite out of place in her department, and she was always too happy to yield the *pas* to her daughter Almeria, who, without hesitation, assumed the reins of government in the household, and subjected every one in it, even Mr. Belmont himself, to her imperious domination.

Almeria Belmont had mistaken her vocation in endeavouring to present herself as a finical lady of fashion. Nature had designed her, if nature ever has such a design, for an actress; for she was endowed with wonderful histrionic talent, which, having no other outlet, manifested itself in the facility with which she imitated, we may say mimicked,

whatever peculiarities of voice or manner she perceived among those whom she classed among her "dear five hundred friends." Accustomed to indulge every caprice of her wayward fancy, she often "touched the brink of all we hate" by her wild and extravagant freaks; but there was beneath all this a fund of cleverness, and occasionally some kindness of nature, and some flowers of better growth, which, though almost hidden among the weeds that had grown to rank luxuriance, might have bloomed, if these weeds could have been removed in time. But the tares were daily growing taller and thicker, and the wheat was diminishing in proportion, until the apology, that "it is only pretty Fanny's way," hardly sufficed to justify her conduct to rational and sensible people.

It was a matter of dispute whether she was handsome or not, for her style of beauty, if such it could be called, varied with every new and fantastic dress it was her pleasure to assume; and this perpetual variety, though it must be confessed she managed it with artistic skill, was not calculated to please the refined Parisian taste, which admits of nothing but a chaste simplicity in the costume of young ladies. Sometimes she would appear arrayed in gorgeous silks or velvets, that would have done honour to her grandmother;—anon she was to be seen like a sylphid, all gauze and flowers;—then in oriental magnificence, blazing with jewels that a queen might have been proud to wear; but always seeking something new, and throwing the carefully-studied costume aside as soon as it had performed its work of mystifying or astonishing society by its simplicity or its splendour.

So much time and space have been devoted to its inhabitants, that an equally minute review of the establishment itself might be tedious. It will suffice to give a single specimen of the furniture of the *salon* in the centre of the gorgeous suite of apartments where the company was assembled, from which the rest may be imagined.

A divan of very large circumference occupied the centre of this lofty room, and was covered with the finest tapestry that the almost fabulous skill of Gobelins work could supply. This divan surrounded a table composed of malachite, except the top, which was inlaid with Florentine mosaic of the rarest and costliest workmanship. In the centre of this table were three ormolu cherubs, as large as life, with wings outspread, and supporting, on their upraised hands, a large and magnificent corbeille, crowned with flowers, which drooped over its sides in graceful pendent wreaths, and

up in the centre, meeting a lustre of ormoulu filled with wax lights, that threw a flood of radiance over this model of art. After this specimen, it would be useless to speak of curtains of crimson velvet and gold, of Gobelins carpets, of endless mazes of mirrors; far less would there be time to pause at the rich works of art in painting and sculpture, as well as *objets de vertu*, with which the apartments were profusely decorated.

A favourite fancy of Almeria's merits attention, though it was one that she had copied, and which has since become too common to be remarked upon; the music which gave life to the scene was placed behind a bower of freshly-blooming flowers, large enough to have realized the idea of a *fête champêtre* at Christmas.

Almeria Belmont was seated on the divan, in the centre of the room, and by her side sat Madame de St. Clair. They were conversing with some animation, for Madame de St. Clair seemed to be aroused from her usually assumed air of graceful languor by the sallies of her companion; and, to judge from an occasional furtive glance, or almost imperceptible shrug, the "dear five hundred friends," then and there assembled, were not unfrequently the subjects of their discourse, as well as of merciless criticism.

An elaborate study of Almeria's costume for the occasion had resulted, as too great an anxiety on the subject often does result, in an unfortunate selection. She had directed the celebrated Victorine to make three dresses of different colours, that she might decide definitively upon the exact colour and shade suited to her complexion, though almost every tint of the rainbow had often before been put in requisition for this object.

The usual tantalising delay occurred; for what lady had not sometimes experienced the anxiety occasioned by the professed punctuality, if it could be called by such a name, of Mademoiselle Victorine? The *coiffeur* had performed his part, to a miracle; the toilette was completed in every particular except the robe; but neither of the three dresses had arrived. Lights were blazing within and without the splendid establishment, and the suppressed sound of the musical instruments, as the artists accorded them, began to be heard in the apartments.

The door-bell rang imperatively. Was it the arrival of the first of the invited guests? No! the dresses at last *made their appearance*, carried in triumphal procession by *the obsequious attendants*, in three gigantic band-boxes; and

were laid side by side, to invite the choice of the happy owner of such treasures.

The white one was tried and rejected. It was too simple. One white dress looked like another, and, besides, white did not accord with her complexion, which was decidedly brunetta. The rose might perhaps suit better; but the colour was too pale, and the same objection applied to pale rose colour as to white. The last one was tried. Like all the robes of the great *modiste*, it fitted to perfection. It was a brilliant shade of yellow, elaborately ornamented, and the richness of the material gave it a heavier effect; but there was novelty in it, for a young lady had never been seen in a similar one, and with a gorgeous *parure* of emeralds, Almeria determined that it should electrify the world of fashion.

The fan à l'*antique*, the Brussels lace handkerchief, and a bouquet of the rarest and most costly flowers that art could produce from the treasures of nature, were successively presented by the officious hand-maidens, and Almeria descended to the receiving-rooms with delighted anticipation of the sensation her superb toilette would excite.

As she passed mirror after mirror in walking through the long suite of rooms, each reflection of her image was less and less satisfactory to herself. The dress was rich and elegant, the emeralds a duchess might have envied; but she had never in her own eyes looked less pleasing. She knew she was young; she had at times thought herself handsome. She was tall and well made, her eyes were black and brilliant, and the colour of the dress was not ill chosen for a dark complexion. But the freshness of youth, for her twenty-four years might still lay claim to that freshness, was hidden beneath the load of finery, and as she passed the last mirror she would have given far more than the value of all three of her costly robes, if she had contented herself with the simple white one. It was now too late to remedy the mistake, and an uncomfortable consciousness of being unbecomingly attired crept over her spirits, and finished the unfortunate work of the toilette by giving to her countenance a restless and dissatisfied expression.

The arrival of the numerous guests, with all their compliments on the elegance of the entertainment and the charms of the young hostess, for Mrs. Belmont pleaded indisposition and was absent, partially but not entirely restored her self-complacency, and as she seated herself on the divan by *Madame de St. Clair*, she anticipated more pleasure than she

had yet enjoyed in the solace afforded by criticising their numerous acquaintance.

In this amiable and pleasing occupation they were deeply engaged when Mr. Melville's party was announced. Almeria rose to welcome them, but a bitter pang of envy shot through her soul, like an envenomed dart, as her eye rested on Constance.

Constance was again attired in the pure white dress, though the practised eye of Madame de St. Clair perceived at a glance that it was not the same she had worn the preceding evening. But it was characterised by all which that lady had triumphantly pointed out to Reginald as distinguishing the charms of the Signorina Visconti. The same faultless purity that she had so much eulogized was again observable in it,—every fold in its right place, and fitted to a charm. The white flowers that ornamented, without too much concealing, her fine hair, were interwoven with a few forget-me-nots,—their delicate blue, as well as a bracelet of blue enamel and pearls, pleasingly contrasted with her pure complexion. Above all, the expression of her sunny eyes, and the unaffected grace which distinguished every movement, completed the charm of her appearance.

Almeria caught a glimpse of her reflected image by the side of this angelic-looking creature, and she felt at that moment as if she could have torn away the massive ornaments that loaded her brow, her neck and arms, and thrown them from her in disgust. But such an exhibition of mortified vanity would have been worse than ridiculous, and she was compelled to "smile and smile," with the viper of jealousy gnawing at her heart.

This feeling was not diminished when Reginald was announced with Mr. Melville's party. It was not the first time Almeria had seen him, and, whenever she had met with him in society, it happened that some criticism or sarcasm in which she indulged, met with a brilliant rejoinder and repartee from him, and this, while it piqued, had interested her.

She had a long list of admirers, and her vanity might have been content with the number, and, in some instances, the names of those who wore her chains; but she had wit enough to perceive that the chains would not have been borne so willingly if they had not been made of gold, and she secretly sighed for something that gold could not buy, the sympathy of a heart more true and noble than those daily laid at her feet, which she declared her vision was not microscopic enough to see.

There was no hope of weaving the golden net around Reginald, for fortune had favoured him too far for her to build her hopes on this glittering but false foundation. Yet she hoped,—for every vain woman can find some ground for hope, if she permits her fancy to dwell continually upon a handsome young man. But this fatal evening seemed to come as a blighting frost upon these hopes, and she looked upon the white-robed Constance as she would have done upon a snow-wreath falling upon her budding flowers, chilling and perhaps extinguishing their early life.

But no such flowers had ever budded in the true and noble heart she would have given all her jewels to captivate, and that "pearl of price," for which she would willingly have exchanged all her own, was in better keeping than hers. Almeria Belmont was the last person in the world to please a taste as pure, and almost fastidious, as that of Reginald Villiers, and he had always so sedulously avoided her, and the attentions she found means to place in his way, that she might have suspected, though her vanity as well as his politeness blinded her to the sober truth, which was—that he detested her.

Madame de St. Clair made room for the newly arrived guests upon the luxurious divan; and politeness demanded the particular attention of Almeria to her lovely rival, as she regarded Constance. Her jealousy was farther stimulated by the discovery that the gentle young girl had a wit as keen as her own, though chastened by modesty and kindness of heart, and that the shafts of her ridicule or malice would fall as harmlessly by her as if they had been aimed at an adamant shield.

With her skill as a practised actress, she changed her tone of masculine levity, and assumed all the feminine grace of a young novice in the world. Constance was partially, but not entirely, deceived,—she had never seen Almeria before. Reginald looked with surprise at the metamorphosis, but it only steeled his heart more completely to any influence she might have hoped to exercise upon him.

The half hour allotted for the visit soon passed away, and Mrs. Melville rose to depart.

"We shall meet at the Spanish ambassador's ball next Sunday, I hope," said Madame de St. Clair.

"No, I have declined the invitation," replied Mrs. Melville.

"Declined the invitation!" exclaimed Madame de St. Clair, with surprise, "why, it will be the *bouquet* of the whole season, the most brilliant entertainment ever seen in this

brilliant metropolis. What can be the cause of your disappointment?"

"A very simple one," said Mrs. Melville, "I do not go to balls on Sunday."

Madame de St. Clair shrugged her shoulders. She was evidently curious to know whether the real cause had been assigned for this strange determination.

"Perhaps," she said, forgetting in her curiosity the impertinence of the suggestion, "your invitations may have been mislaid. I think it may be best to inquire."

"Pardon me," said Mrs. Melville, smiling. "I have not only received my invitations, but the Comtesse d'Ofalia has honoured me with some blank ones for my friends, so that I shall be compelled, if I am catechised about it, honestly to confess the truth."

Almeria looked after Mrs. Melville, as she retired.

"How very absurd!" exclaimed Madame de St. Clair.

"Absurd!—yes,—no,"—replied Almeria, absently, "except that honesty and truth are always absurd in what we call society. But I wish we had more of them. I am sick of compliments—of deceit—of the world—of myself—of everything!"

"Why, how pettish you are this evening, chérie; you are quite a different being from what you were half an hour ago."

There was an insinuation in this remark on the part of her friend that displeased Almeria. She rose and made politeness a pretext for following Mrs. Melville to the last room in the suite. The carriages had been announced, and Reginald was about to take his departure also. Almeria affected to misunderstand his intention.

"Mr. Villiers," she said, with gentle hesitation, "Madame de St. Clair has requested me to ask the pleasure of your company a moment, as she informs me she has satisfactory information about the picture in which you expressed so much interest. You will then, I hope, pardon the liberty of hostess I assume in asking you to attend her to supper." And with a thousand pretty regrets and adieux to Mrs. Melville and Constance, she glided back among her guests and to the divan.

Reginald was half tempted to disobey the mandate, but such a step would have been an offence against all the rules of civilized society, and after proffering the useless services of a cavalier to ladies completely attended, and exchanging a courteous "good night," he was compelled to return to the

salon, where he found Madame de St. Clair and Almeria together.

"We were discussing the merits of the party with whom you came," said Madame de St. Clair to Reginald, as he approached her, "and I should like to hear your opinion."

"They have then, as Sir Peter Teazle would say, left their characters behind them, I presume," said Reginald, "for I think I have formerly heard some animated discussions on similar subjects, in the society in which I have the honour to find myself at present."

"Oh shocking!" exclaimed Madame de St. Clair. "Why, you and Almeria are perfectly savage to-night."

Almeria rose and made a courtesy of acknowledgment. Reginald bowed. "We are very grateful for the compliment," she said, "but Mr. Villiers has not yet answered your question."

"I have sojourned too long in this metropolis," said Reginald, smiling, "not to know that it is dangerous to tell one lady what I think of another. If you include Mr. Melville in your catechism, I will give you a quaint answer made long ago, but a worthier one than any I can devise—I should say, 'that he is a gentleman steady in his principles, of nice honour, with abundance of learning: brave as the sword he wears, and bold as a lion: a sure friend, and a man who would lose his life readily to serve his country, and would not do a base thing to save it.'"

He spoke with enthusiasm, and Almeria sighed. Reginald had given an unconscious sketch of his own feelings and character. How different from the imperceptible hearts she daily rejected was this noble one!

"This sounds finely," said Madame de St. Clair, "but the merit would depend on the country that one is to serve or save. If it is the odious one that Christopher Columbus found out, I think it neither worth serving nor saving, and it would have been much wiser in Queen Isabella to have reserved her patronage for a better purpose than encouraging such a discovery. But here is the Comte de B—. He will give us an impartial opinion on the merits of Miss Melville." And she laid her white-gloved hand tenderly on his arm.

The count took the hand and pressed it, but seemed rather at a loss what to do with it afterwards, for he was a man more of letters than society. He had recently made the acquisition of English, to aid him in his literary researches, and his manner of speaking the language, while studiously

correct, was so precise and pedantic that it was ludicrous in the extreme. Almeria, who never lost an opportunity of ridicule and sarcasm, especially when a dear friend could be made the object, was evidently gratified that the count should address all his remarks to Madame de St. Clair in her despised vernacular, instead of his graceful French.

"I am hardly prepar-*ed* to express an opinion," he replied, "but as the young lady pass-*ed* us, she appear-*ed* to me very distinguish-*ed*. Yet I have not avail-*ed* myself of the opportunity allow-*ed* me, to form a decid-*ed* judgment."

"The reason you have assign-*ed*, Monsieur le Comte," said Almeria, casting down her eyes with an air of timid hesitation and modesty, "is one we should have consider-*ed* conclusive. We should have been compell-*ed* to renounce the opinions we had form-*ed* on the subject, if yours had differ-*ed* from our own."

Reginald was astonished that the cool impertinence of this mockery should not have been detected, but happily for Almeria the count did not perceive it, and passed on with an amiable bow and smile.

"Almeria!" exclaimed Madame de St. Clair, reddening with anger, "this passes all limits. The Comte de B—— is a particular friend of mine, and it is intolerable to see him ridiculed to his face!"

"And it is precisely because you have ascrib-*ed* that title to him," returned Almeria, laughing, "that I amus-*ed* myself, and fear-*ed* not, but push-*ed* my remark to the verge of impertinence, that his friend might be amaz-*ed*, vex-*ed*, annoy-*ed*, and enrag-*ed* at the wit I reveal-*ed*."

Madame de St. Clair was too angry to remonstrate. She rose and walked to the supper-room. Almeria followed her, still laughing.

"I have vow-*ed* that I will not be quarrel-*ed* with," she said, "and as I have perceiv-*ed* that you are distress-*ed*, the subject shall be dropp-*ed* and dismiss-*ed*. You shall be cajol-*ed*, caress-*ed*, kiss-*ed*, and charm-*ed*, until the evil spirit in me is exorcis-*ed*, and the count aveng-*ed*."

Reginald found himself compelled to escort Madame de St. Clair to the supper-room; but, once arrived there, he found an acquaintance to whom he delegated his office, and, to the great disappointment of Almeria, when her friend returned to the *salon*, she was accompanied by another escort. The cavalier she had hoped to delay by her ingenious expedient had passed quietly through a side-door in the supper-room, and made his escape.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PASTOR AND HIS FAMILY.

THE few last chapters having been exclusively occupied with the gay and brilliant scenes of society, it may have been imagined that Mr. Melville and his family had followed the example often set by the strangers who flock to this seductive metropolis, and that they had left all serious thoughts behind them, to be resumed at "a more convenient season." This would be doing them great injustice; for while they accepted the elegant hospitalities amiably and graciously extended to them, and while they availed themselves of every suitable occasion to gratify a rational curiosity in seeing all that would liberalize the mind or cultivate the taste, they found such a course not inconsistent with holier and more important duties.

One of their first inquiries on their arrival in the capital was for a place of worship, and three were indicated. All honour be ascribed to the piety of that nation which has established these chapels throughout the continent of Europe! Amid the gorgeous cathedrals of cities, in remote districts, in the region of the snow-clad Alps, these temples rise, inviting the sympathizing stranger to their courts, and offering wells of "living water" to quench the thirst of the wearied pilgrim in life's wilderness, like the "streams in the desert."

At this epoch, one of these chapels was to be found in the midst of a large garden in the Champs Elysées. It had once been dedicated to a less holy purpose, for the garden had been a resort of pleasure, and the chapel a public ball-room. But pious hands had wrought a change there which is sometimes seen in the human heart, and all that was beautiful was dedicated to holy purposes, renewed and changed, but not destroyed. The garden had been carefully preserved, and gave an air of seclusion to the spot, that was doubly grateful in escaping from the noisy gambols of the throngs who make the day designed to be one of holy rest, a day of ceaseless and tumultuous excitement, which they miscall pleasure.

It was a strange transition, in turning from the avenue of the Champs Elysées, where thousands of people were driving or walking, where itinerant confectioners and mountebanks were blocking up the passage of brilliant equipages or gay young horsemen, where mimic ships were sailing on imagi-

nary waves in the air, or regiments of soldiers, preceded by military bands, were marching in long array, to take refuge in this peaceful spot, and shut the door upon the rushing torrent of life without.

In this quiet sanctuary Mr. Melville and his family found a resting-place and a home for the devotional hours of each Sunday, and the pleasing aspect of the young pastor, Mr. Montague, gave them promise of an interesting addition to their society. Their constant attendance at his chapel awakened the wish, on his side, of forming their acquaintance, and he called with Mrs. Montague to pay his respects.

Mr. Melville's family were absent on the morning of their visit, but the call was promptly returned. On inquiring for Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Melville was informed that Mrs. Montague was indisposed. The next day, and the next, inquiries were made. "She was ill—very ill," was the reply. Sunday came, and the pastor was replaced by another. The mournful countenances of his sympathizing flock revealed the sad truth. He had just received the last breath of his sainted partner—she was dead!

The second Sunday after this melancholy event, the young pastor was again in his accustomed place, though his pale cheek and dimmed eye showed but too plainly the sufferings he had undergone in that terrible interval. He looked composed and resigned; but during his discourse the fortitude of the Christian yielded for a moment to the weakness of nature; and when a lovely infant bearing his own features in miniature was brought to the font to be baptized, the sympathy of the whole assembly manifested itself in tears and even sobs.

With an effort almost convulsive he recovered his firmness and voice, and as with a flushed cheek and tearful eye he pronounced the words, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!" his hearers felt that it would be almost sinful to regret the early departure of this young saint, who had thus been enabled to fortify her dearest earthly friend, and lead him to submit without a murmur to the heaviest of afflictions, in assuring him that she was only "going to prepare a place for him."

Thus vanished the hope Mr. Melville and his family had entertained of forming a friendship that might have grown to intimacy; for, after a few months' trial, the position, with its associations, became too painful to be endured, and Mr. Montague, finding that his health was failing, resigned his charge to another, and left the metropolis.

The events recorded in these three pages had occupied three months, for that space of time had elapsed since Mr. Melville and his family first sought out Mr. Montague's chapel, and formed his acquaintance. His farewell visit had just been paid, and a fervent English "God bless you!" exchanged. Mrs. Melville and Constance, saddened by the recollection of his sorrows, as well as their own deprivation in the loss of his society, were sitting together in the room which was habitually, at that hour, dedicated to the instructions of Madame Laval.

Madame Laval, always punctual to the moment, came at her appointed time; but a single glance at her usually bright face told that, instead of bringing with her cheerfulness and consolation, she was even sadder than themselves, and that something had evidently occurred to agitate and grieve her. The recitations of her pupils were completed; and, until this morning, a gay and animated conversation had always succeeded these exercises, forming the most agreeable as well as instructive part of her lessons. She tried evidently to rally her spirits for the effort, but in vain. At length the exertion on her part became manifestly so painful, that Constance felt impelled to relieve her from it.

"I fear you are not so well as usual this morning, *chère madame*," she said rather timidly, for she was apprehensive that there might be some cause for the agitation she perceived, which Madame Laval would be unwilling to reveal, and that her allusion to it might be indiscreet.

Madame Laval made a faint effort to smile; the exertion was too much, and she burst into tears.

Constance was shocked: she rose, and taking Madame Laval's hand in both hers, with a look of affectionate sympathy, asked her pardon for the indiscretion which had apparently awakened a sorrow she wished to remain unrevealed. Little Alice nestled to her side, and looked wistfully in her face, with her blue eyes filled with sympathetic tears. Madame Laval with a strong effort recovered her composure. She kissed the pearly drops away from the blue eyes, and returned the kind pressure of the hands that caressed hers.

"I am almost ashamed," she said, "to show such weakness, but the tears I could not repress were not shed for any grief of my own. I have just witnessed a scene so heart-rending, that I should be almost afraid to portray it to imaginations so lively and hearts so tender as yours. Yet it may be the will of Heaven to alleviate the sufferings I have just seen by describing them to you."

"I should deeply regret, madame," said Mrs. Melville, "that my daughters should be deterred from listening to a tale of distress because their sensibilities might be wounded by it. I think you may trust Constance, for there would be little good done in the world, if we were not in early life to have our sympathies awakened, however painfully. This extreme of sensibility is too often a plausible pretext for shrinking from an imperative duty."

Thus encouraged, and perceiving that Constance was deeply interested in the communication she felt disposed to make, Madame Laval replied, "I know not indeed if it is not an imperative duty to mention the circumstances that affected me so powerfully; but, to justify myself entirely, I should be compelled to give a brief history of the persons to whom these circumstances relate."

"We shall listen with all our hearts, as well as our ears," said Constance, "if you will oblige us by the recital, madame. I think you owe me some reparation for supposing me too sensitive."

"My story is very simple as well as very sad," said Madame Laval; "and there are probably many sufferers in this great city, at the present inclement season, who might tell one of almost equal misery. But it happens that I have for some years known the persons to whom mine relates, and this is one reason that I was so much overcome by unexpectedly finding them in the most deplorable state of poverty and wretchedness."

"As long as six years ago, I knew a pretty, modest girl, Sophie by name, who became suddenly an orphan, and was left destitute of all except the excellent principles she had received from her worthy parents. She gratefully accepted the offer made her to accompany a lady of our acquaintance to her château in the neighbourhood of Geneva. During the sojourn of the family with whom she was living at this place, Sophie became acquainted with a young gardener who assisted in cultivating and embellishing the extensive grounds of the château. The friendship formed between them soon ripened into a stronger feeling, the acquaintance became a suitor, and Antoine, the young gardener, was in due time the proud and happy husband of the pretty Sophie."

"Their marriage was apparently sanctioned by the wealthy proprietors, but, from some cause which has never been explained, Sophie was soon dismissed, and Antoine, without receiving any excuse or indemnity for the caprice, was ad-

vised by Mr. Belmont, the proprietor of the château, to quit his service at Geneva, and to seek his fortune in Paris. The knowledge and experience Antoine had acquired in his beautiful art enabled him for some time to succeed tolerably well. Sophie conducted herself with exemplary propriety, and became the mother of four children, the second-born twins.

"Their cares thus increased, it became difficult to maintain themselves; but they struggled bravely on until the beginning of this terrible season, when poor Sophie became the mother of her fourth child, and her husband fell ill of a rheumatic fever, in consequence of attempting work to which he was unaccustomed. Despairing of his regular vocation from the continued falls of snow, while the gardens he had been accustomed to tend were buried, and his patrons lent an unwilling ear to his tale of distress, he sought occupation in joining the thousands of poor, who for a miserable pittance were daily employed in clearing the streets of snow. This was the cause of the severe illness which exhausted all his little earnings, as well as those of his young wife.

"Their scanty stock of furniture was sold piece by piece, their wardrobe went next, and, on inquiring for them this morning, I found they had been turned from the humble, though decent, lodging in which I had last seen them. I traced them from place to place, and at last found them. Oh, what a scene of destitution and misery met my sight! Sophie and her four little ones were huddled together in a small dark cellar-room, the walls actually streaming with moisture. Her eldest girl, a child of five years old, was holding the baby on her lap, and, with precocious skill and tenderness, endeavouring to lull its feeble cries. The other little ones—how proud the mother had been of her twin boys!—were spreading their chilled hands over the blackened ashes of what had once been a fire in the desolate hearth.

"Poor Sophie was lying on a heap of straw, covered with an old blanket. She looked deadly pale, and neither spoke nor moved, until I approached her and took her hand. She looked up wistfully, and closed her eyes again. The story that glance told was dreadful,—she was perishing with want!

"At that moment Antoiné entered. I hardly took time then to remark what I have since often thought of, his haggard, wild expression; but, putting money into his hand, bade him hasten with all speed to the nearest magazine for

wood to make the fire, telling him that I would return instantly with food. I flew to the nearest baker and provided myself with bread, next with a bottle of good wine, and the butcher with whom I deal happily lived in that neighbourhood. The good man was busily occupied in decking his fat sirloins with artificial flowers for the approaching carnival, but he gave a ready ear to my sad tale, and supplied me with some of his finest chops, as well as a good piece of the carnival beef, lent me a large basket in which to bestow my treasures, and granted me, moreover, the services of his boy to carry it for me. To these I added another bottle containing milk for the famishing babe, and returned with all the haste that a nervous tremor permitted.

"Happily a marmite and a gridiron had been saved from the wreck of all their household and kitchen furniture. I found that Antoine had been faithful to my instructions, and on my return a fire was blazing in the hearth, so that our united exertions soon prepared a comfortable meal. I cannot describe the sensations of happiness and gratitude I felt when I saw these poor creatures gradually reviving under the influences of warmth and wholesome food. They submitted more readily to my advice than I could have imagined possible, in partaking sparingly at first of the food I had brought them, but I took the precaution of plunging my large piece of beef into the marmite, and filling it with water, lest they should be too much tempted to devour it before the nourishing soup could be made, on which I depended for their next meal.

"Thus I relieved them for the moment; but they are still in that wretched cellar, and grim famine, though banished or the present, is still prowling around their door. My slender means did not admit of more than temporary relief for them, and I revolved in my mind all the plans I could devise for their assistance."

"I should not suppose that it would have required a moment's reflection," said Constance. "Mr. Belmont with his princely wealth, will be only too happy to relieve poor Antoine and his family, especially as they were once in his service."

"The idea is a natural one," replied Madame Laval, "and as such I acted on it without a moment's hesitation. As soon as I saw the sufferers restored to some degree of comfort, I went directly to Mr. Belmont's hotel, and happily *found entrance*. Miss Belmont was just stepping into her *chariot*, and seemed very impatient of detention. but I in-

sisted on giving her the particulars I have detailed to you, though as briefly as possible.

"Indeed, Madame Laval," she replied, pettishly, when I had concluded, 'it is impossible for me to wait and listen to all these sorts of things. I have an appointment with Victorine this morning to try some dresses for the Princess V——'s fancy ball, and I cannot be detained longer.'

"I answered that I had no wish to detain her, but that I hoped she would provide me with the means of relieving so much wretchedness out of her superabundant wealth; and I added that, if this unfortunate family could only receive sufficient assistance to get through the winter, they could then earn a livelihood. I said that I would call and see her when she returned from her morning engagement.

"Oh, pray don't!" exclaimed Miss Belmont hastily, 'I shall be out all the morning, and there will hardly be time to dress for a dinner party we have to-day. Papa is at home, ask him about it.' And waving her hand impatiently to the footman who stood awaiting her orders, she was whirled off in an instant.

"With a heavy heart I ascended the great marble stairway, for I had a presentiment of failure, after this first experiment. Mr. Belmont was within, as his daughter had said, but made an evident effort to escape as I entered the room where he was standing. He closed his lips more firmly, and knitted his brows, as I repeated my story to him.

"Antoine has no business here," he said. "He should have remained in his own country."

"I did not venture to hint the truth, which was that the poor fellow had been influenced by Mr. Belmont's advice in coming to Paris, and only pleaded that, even if the charge of imprudence was just, he and his family were perishing with misery and want.

"The government must take care of its paupers," was the cold reply. "It is not my affair. If I had listened to all such tales, I should be a pauper myself. Besides, I do not like these fine lady ways of raising money for the poor. When I give anything, it must pass through the hands of responsible men."

"The insinuation," continued Madame Laval, "was so broadly insulting, that it left me no alternative, and I indignantly quitted the house. The cruelty of this hard man, and the painful scene I had just witnessed, must together plead my excuse for the weakness I have perhaps too plainly manifested."

"Your sensibility and indignation do you honour, madame," said Mrs. Melville, "and I assure you we sympathize in both; but this will not advance the cause you have so nobly espoused; we must see what can be done. I imagine I have rather more reason for the apprehension of Mr. Belmont, than he has with his millions, especially as the charity fund I laid aside in the beginning of this terrible season has long ago been exhausted; but we must make some sacrifices for your protégés. Have you nothing to propose, my daughter?"

Constance had been in a deep reverie for a few minutes. Her mother had evidently divined her thoughts, for she replied, "Yes, I have something to propose. I will give up the fancy ball of the Princess V—, and devote the sum that my dress would have cost to this poor family."

The fancy ball of the Princess V— had occupied all the brilliant circles of the metropolis with gossip and anticipation for a month past. The carnival was at hand, and the last days immediately preceding the solemn season of Lent were characterized by a more frenzied gaiety than usual. While the common classes of people were amusing themselves with leading the *bœuf gras*, garlanded with flowers, through the streets,—while maskers and mummers, in patches and paint, ribbons and streamers, were parading in open carriages through the Boulevards, or assembling at the tumultuous and riotous masked balls of the opera,—the more fastidious, but not less self-indulgent, ranks of society were imbibing their draughts of fashionable pleasure through the "golden tube of polite refinement," and luxuriating in such scenes as the splendid fancy ball promised by the Princess V—.

Constance had never seen a fancy ball, and her curiosity was naturally excited. Besides, her young friends daily expatiated on the charms of her intended costume. How lovely she would look in the bergère Pompadour style, half marquise, half shepherdess!—the fantasie so successfully revived by Maria Antoinette. It required no small effort to renounce such a pleasure, but she made it bravely.

Mrs. Melville rose, and kissed her daughter's fair brow.

"You act wisely and well, my child," she said, "and your resolution gives me sincere pleasure, in more ways than one. I wished you to decide this matter for yourself, and I do not doubt that you would have found the happiness you anticipated far less than what you experience at this instant in renouncing it."

Madame Laval was pouring forth her acknowledgments of this kindness, and her admiration of the noble resolution of Constance, when it happened that, at this opportune moment for strengthening all his prepossessions and increasing his admiration, already too great for his peace of mind, Mr. Reginald Villiers was announced, and entered the room. His visits had now become almost daily, and though no exact explanation of his feelings had been made, every glance of his expressive eyes had revealed his yet untold love. He was happy in the thought that he was understood, and waited until time should more fully confirm the sentiments he trusted were awakened in the heart of the loved one, before he made a declaration of his passion.

It needed not the ready tact of Madame Laval to interest him in the story of Antoine. It was enough for him that Constance had listened to it, and was ready to make such a sacrifice as the one which Madame Laval was extolling.

"I am afraid," he said aside to Constance, "that I shall merit little praise for my disinterested generosity, if I dedicate my marquis costume to the same object, for, since you decline going, I have not the least wish to see the Princess V——'s ball."

He took from a rouleau of gold twenty louis-d'or, and, presenting them to Madame Laval, said playfully, "If the embroidered coat and point-lace ruffles of a marquis are as acceptable to a lady as the dress bergère Pompadour of a marquise, I pray you to appropriate mine for the benefit of these poor sufferers."

Madame Laval was entreated, on all sides, not to waste a moment in thanks, but to hasten as quickly as possible on her errand of mercy. With the aid of her active exertions, Antoine and his family were removed that very day from their miserable cellar, and transferred to a small but decent lodging, in a healthy quarter. The furniture and wardrobe, which had been pawned, were quickly redeemed, and they found themselves suddenly raised from the most abject wretchedness to comparative affluence. The sums economized upon the two fancy ball dresses, thus amply sufficed for the humble wants of these poor people until the return of spring, when they had reason to hope that their honest labours might be crowned with success.

The day following these events, Antoine begged permission to accompany Madame Laval in her usual visit, to express his gratitude to his young benefactress. He was still pale and haggard, but he was cleanly dressed, and had evidently

taken special pains to make himself presentable. On entering the room where Constance was sitting alone, he remained modestly standing near the door, and looked earnestly at her, until his eyes filled with tears, that found their channels in his hollow cheeks.

"You have been the good angel you look like, young lady," he said, his voice choking with strong emotion. "You have saved a family from famine, and an immortal soul from perdition? May that God who has rescued me, through your goodness, from misery and crime, ever watch over and bless you!"

CHAPTER XV.

A MASQUERADE.

"THERE was a sound of revelry by night." Not the joyous and light-hearted mirth that invites the young, the gay, the careless to its jocund merriment, but that frenzied gaiety which often serves as a cloak to hide the scorpion passions stinging the breast within, while the lips smile and smile again, as if in derision of their own mockery.

But, amid the mad orgies of a *bal masqué de l'opera*, there needed no such smiles, if they suited not the taste and temper of those who participated in the scene. The faces were concealed by those varied and unnatural masks, which seemed to have taxed all the ingenuity of their contrivers to render them as grotesque, as strange, as wild as the tumultuous revel in which they were so conspicuously displayed.

Turks, Jews, and Arabs, the Chinese and Esquimaux, Franciscan monks in sackcloth, lady abbesses with rosaries, imps and angels, women in sailors' costume, and men in the guise of women, all were mingled together in the fury of the *dansomania*, which was fast rising to its greatest height.

Amid this innumerable and ever-increasing throng, whose uproarious propensities seemed only repressed by their awe of the gens-d'armes stationed at intervals throughout the scene of action, and who were invested with authority to banish such of this goodly assembly as should in their opinion pass the prescribed limits of decorum, were seen two young men, simply concealed from the gaze of the multitude by the ordinary disguise of a black domino.

They had retired a little from the crowd, which they were surveying through their opera-glasses, though they seemed, *only for a moment at a time*, to enter into the spirit of the

scene. Apparently their thoughts and conversation were engaged on graver topics.

"*La messe et la chasse!* Victor," said one of these young men to his companion, as they were approached by a monk of La Trappe arm in arm with an outlaw of Sherwood Forest dressed in Lincoln green, with baldric and bugle. "*La messe et la chasse!* our worthy sovereign Charles X. should certainly be here to behold these superb representatives of his favourite occupations."

"I must beg leave to differ with you in opinion, citizen," said a mask standing near, and availing himself of the license permitted on these occasions to join in the conversation. "I must beg leave to differ with you as to the propriety and expediency of introducing majesty among us at a moment when pleasure should reign supreme. For my own part, I am too happy for once to be relieved from the presence of royalty."

"*A propos* of royalty," interposed another member of this select company, who had imagined the quaint device of investing his person in a huge balloon of striped green silk, emulating a gigantic melon, while his red vest, appearing through an opening in front, was garnished with shining black buttons resembling the seeds of the ripe fruit; "*a propos* of royalty, have either of you attended the exposition of manufactures that took place this morning? *Par bleu!* I wonder that a cook had the spirit to run himself through with a sword instead of his spit, without the provocation of insult or injury, and only because he could not serve majesty with fish, in the days of the *grand monarque*, and that I, Jean Ferron, should have made up my mind to survive the insult I received from this same royalty some hours ago."

"What was it, Mignon?" inquired a jaunty sailor lad, whose brown curls floating beneath a tarpaulin hat, betrayed the coquettish wearer of this most modest and delicately selected costume. "What was it, Jean? Come, enlighten and enliven the company with a history of your adventures; for you have been as stupid as a melon ever since you have been here, acting your part to admiration. I have only been hoping that you would transgress the bounds of propriety, that the *gens d'armes* might have the pleasure of bowling your verdant rotundity out of the *salle*."

"Why, if *you* command," returned the melon, looking with a loving leer at the dashing sailor lad, "I might be willing to run some risk of being turned out, and I must moreover answer your question, albeit your speech is

seasoned with such a spice of politeness as is tasteful to my palate. But if your feet, which are still patting an echo to the music, can remain quiet a moment, I will begin."

"Begin and make an end at once, then," said the sailor lad impatiently, "for I should like to hear if your adventure was like my own, though I fear me your tale will not be worth the gallopade I am losing while listening to your prate."

The melon, thus amicably encouraged, proceeded :

"I attended the exposition this morning, to present to his Majesty a fusil ; one which had cost me the labour of months, one, in short"—and here the melon puffed out his green sides and drew himself proudly up,—“a fusil, in short, worthy of Jean Ferron. Sire, said I, when his Majesty at length made the long-expected tour of the rooms,—Sire! said I, with all humility, and dropping on one knee, permit a poor *fabricant* the honour, great and unmerited as it is, of offering to your Majesty's acceptance a fusil on which I have lavished all my art, to render it worthy of the distinction I hope it will receive at your gracious hands."

"His Majesty eyed the superb fusil for a moment as I held it up, and then what—what do you suppose! No, you never can suppose? My brain reels when I think of what ensued. He said, so carelessly that the last words faintly reached my ear as he passed rapidly on, 'Thank you, friend, your fusil would be of no use to me; I always have mine made in England.'"

"Bravo!—Bravissimo!" shouted the sailor lad. "A proper pendent this for my embroidered silk hose which I presumed to offer to the Duchess de Berri, as her Royal Highness wears her petticoats nearly up to her knees, believing that nobody has a handsome foot and ankle but herself." And here the sailor lad gave a complacent look downwards. "I offered these gems of art to her Grace with all the engaging modesty I could assume for the occasion. She twitched them out of my hand while talking with three cavaliers at once, and tripped on without vouchsafing a glance at the embroiderer, or even inquiring her name. But come, my fine melon, give care to the winds! time passes!" and the sailor lad bowled off the melon, and both were speedily merged in the motley crowd.

"We may draw a deep moral from this colloquy, Delorme," said the domino, who had elicited it by his first remark to his friend. "These wild dancers, grotesque as they seem, have some method in their madness. Wherever I have joined

their busy groups, still the same tone pervades the mass. They are ready now to cry '*à bas les Bourbons.*'"

"Ay!" returned Delorme bitterly, "they are ever ready to be swayed by the caprice of the moment; but where is the arm to guide the vessel amid the storm in such a raging element? whose the eye to foresee,—the genius to profit of coming events?"

"Yours,—yours! my dear Victor!" replied his companion hastily, "why should you for a moment doubt the power you possess over the hearts and minds of your friends, and through them over the thousands who can be fettered by the magic spell you so well know how to wield, until they move as one? Where else can we look with equal confidence? The name of Lafayette still possesses its ancient *prestige*, yet it is but a name, one that might serve as a *drapeau* in the beginning of a revolution. But he is old, and his hand, trembling with the infirmities of nearly eighty years, cannot guide the helm of state amid the surging billows we see fast approaching. True it is that your name has not appeared in the programme of the great drama about to be enacted, but who had heard of Napoleon at your age? Times and circumstances make men. A tree of stateliest growth has arisen from a scion less noble than the one around which so many ardent wishes and brilliant anticipations are now entwined."

"You speak as madly as these wild revellers, Dubourg," said Victor, though his heart swelled high at the enthusiastic language of his friend, and he was well aware that this flattering voice echoed the sentiments of many more.

"You speak madly. Of what avail would it be to stimulate and encourage these frantic people to a revolution? Our scheme of a republic could not be realized; the crowned heads of Europe would be in league against us. But, even could this obstacle be overcome, there is yet another more insurmountable. Suppose the reigning monarch doomed to the scaffold, or exiled with all his immediate family, the hydra head of royalty still exists. It exists in a form yet more dangerous. The Duke of Orleans will still be here. His virtues, his popularity, his numerous family, all render him the most formidable barrier"—

"Assassinate him!" interposed a low hissing voice in an undertone, but sharp and piercing, just in Victor's ear.

He started, and turned his head quickly to see who had thus intruded on a conversation which had been so cautiously conducted that none but an accomplished listener

could have caught the import of the words. He beheld near him a gigantic serpent with horrent crest and "many a scaly fold, voluminous and vast," gliding into the crowd of maskers around.

"Fit counsel for a representative of Satan!" said Delorme, as the monster disappeared from their view.

"And yet—may there not—be some plausibility at least in the idea?" replied Dubourg, hesitating as he pronounced something very like approval of the serpent's counsel. "We might in such a case profit by what we could not foresee or avert. Suppose our reigning monarch banished, and the Duke of Orleans his successor. Do you not suppose his life would be conspired against by those who wished to restore the young Henry V. to the throne of his ancestors? And if their conspiracy were successful, might we not profit by the deed without being sharers in the crime?"

Delorme shuddered, but in another moment he recovered his self-possession.

"This is no place," he said, "to discuss topics so dangerous. We have already been overheard, whether by friend or foe I know not. But I am weary of this scene of confusion. Let us avoid the crowd of our companions forming at yonder door to intercept our retreat, and pass out on the other side. The morning is approaching too fast for me, even, to wish you good night!"

With these words the friends separated, threading the throng to the door of entrance as rapidly as the dense mass permitted, and returned to their respective homes——

But not to sleep. For Victor tossed in vain on his pillow, notwithstanding the precaution he had taken to banish every ray of the dawning light from his apartment. There was a fever in his veins, as well as in his mind. A feeling of bitterness, of remorse, of shame forced itself on him, as he remembered the events of the past night.

He had not only been a witness of scenes revolting to the character on which he had once prided himself—that of superior refinement,—not simply was he a spectator for an hour, and as a matter of curiosity, at these mad orgies and in their kindred haunts, but he found himself habitually drawn into them as one of the initiated. True it was that he had not joined in the buffoonery, not to use a harsher word, that had distinguished the scene of the preceding evening. But he experienced a loathing in the recollection of it, and a feeling of uneasy dissatisfaction with himself at the facility

with which he was induced to make appointments for such places.

Then came the remembrance of his numerous conversations with these busy and tumultuous companions and followers,—their reckless language, their wild schemes, their frenzied ambition. Again he heard repeated in suppressed murmurs "*à bas les Bourbons!*"—Again, when sinking into a disturbed slumber, his imagination pictured the serpent at his ear with sharp hissing tones, pronouncing the ominous words, "assassinate him!"

Nor was there less of self-reproach mingled with the reflection that in these hideous words, and the oracular manner in which they had reached his ear, a clue was afforded him to a dark and mysterious conversation which he had been, as if purposely, permitted to overhear, some time before, at one of these midnight assemblies. If the suggestion then made was only one of vague and uncertain character, and spoken of as a desperate expedient of the Carlists, when their sovereign might be dethroned and replaced by another branch of the Bourbon family, the complacency with which the idea was discussed proved that there were other factions to whom such a deed would not be unacceptable, if they could escape the odium attached to it.

The half-approval given by Dubourg to the atrocious idea of the assassination of the Duke of Orleans, convinced him that there was no crime, however revolting, that might not be called a "virtue" or a "necessity" in the enormous latitude of the revolutionary vocabulary. He felt as one on the brink of a yawning gulf, whose edges were already crumbling beneath his feet. For a moment he wavered, hesitated, looked backward, and longed to escape. His imagination filled the winds with mingled hisses and groans and shouts of execration that would pursue him in his retreat. He looked forward—the volcanic gulf still yawned before him, displayed more fully to his view by a lurid glare within. His resolve was made—no alternative seemed to remain but to leap with one mighty effort to the opposite side!

Victor started suddenly, and the dreamy vision that had begun to steal over his senses was banished.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE INCOGNITA.

WHILE Victor Delorme was thus the prey of conflicting passions, and haunted even in his feverish slumbers by the demon of ambition, he little suspected that he was the dupe of a man more subtle, more artful than himself.

Victor, as we have seen, had sometimes experienced feelings of self-reproach and repentance, while engaged in the mad career that he flattered himself was leading him to a glorious distinction. His *friend*, if a title so sacred and so unmerited could be applied to Dubourg, had not even the headlong impulse of early youth to plead as an excuse for the indulgence of evil passions; for he was the senior of Victor by several years, and had long accustomed himself to subject every impulse and every other passion to the two that ruled him with equally despotic sway—avarice and ambition. His ambition was, indeed, so far merged in the meaner passion of avarice, that they were inseparably mingled in his sordid mind.

He had risen from a lowly station in life by struggles with adverse fortune, and his sinuous course had been marked by many a deed that an honest man would have blushed to be suspected of. But he concealed the basest acts under a cloak of hypocrisy so skilfully adjusted as to blind the keenest eyes, for his tact and talent were only equalled by his utter destitution of principle.

Dubourg had not the advantage of a handsome person to recommend him; but even this he knew how to turn to his own account, for there was less danger of rivalry from those who possessed "the fatal gift," and his secret machinations were less suspected beneath the unpretending guise in which he chose to appear. Still, he availed himself of every art to win the confidence of his dupes, and successfully practised each one that gave him influence in the circles in which he appeared. The patronage of a few persons of distinction, on whose goodnature he found means to impose, or whose laxity of principle made the talent of Dubourg useful to them, had given him access to their society, and he was often seen in the *salons* of the great, passing with the good-natured, who were too indolent to examine his pretensions, for "a good fellow," and with the unprincipled as "a man of decided genius."

His most efficient patron he had found in Mr. Belmont,

who entertained, and not without reason, a high opinion of the capacity of Dubourg. In many transactions, which both the man of genius and his patron would have been most unwilling to reveal to the scrutinizing eyes of the commercial world, Mr. Belmont had found Dubourg eminently useful to him. But the patron, though often blinded and duped by his assistant, never relaxed his gripe upon the treasures on which the longing eyes of the latter were stedfastly fixed. He began to grow faint with unappeased hunger, as he daily surveyed the glittering heaps accumulating—but not for him. His was one of the hearts that Almeria had declared her vision not sufficiently microscopic to see, and he found it impossible to exercise his arts to any advantage with a father, whose soul was iron-bound like the chests that contained his gold, and with a daughter whose caprices would baffle them, or break through the subtlest web that his ingenuity could weave around her.

The hope of a successful termination of his suit had led him to seek Almeria at her father's *château* near Geneva, and while there, he frequently saw the young gardener and his pretty bride.

The reasons that induced him to join Mr. Belmont in recommending to Antoine to seek his fortunes in Paris soon became apparent. The unsuspecting young gardener was easily persuaded by the officious zeal of his new patron, who promised him everything. How these fair promises were fulfilled has been seen. Sophie was less tempted by the insidious offer of the imperceptible heart than Almeria had been, and hated, as far as her kind nature could hate, the base man who was the author of all the misfortunes; for he continued to follow Antoine with secret malice, and by a look, a shrug, or an innuendo, whenever appealed to for testimonials of his character, effectually barred the door to his success.

To be effective, wickedness, as well as virtue, must have materials to work with. In laying the train of the approaching revolution, there were some materials wanted which were only to be found where misery and destitution render crime familiar. But Dubourg, and the most unprincipled of his associates, required something to further their designs, which it was difficult to find. They needed men with principle enough to be trusted with the darkest plots, without betraying their instigators, and whose abject poverty might lead them to crime for the sake of the gold that could save them from famine.

It was precisely in this situation that the secret machinations of Dubourg had placed the unfortunate Antoine, though he was careful never to awaken suspicion against himself. The Swiss at that time was selected for his fidelity to the interests of his employer,—a recommendation well attested by the pertinacity with which royalty itself leaned upon a guard of that nation, in preference to the homeborn regiments.

Antoine, sorely beset, bewildered by the vague insinuations and golden promises of the conspirators, weakened by illness, tortured by the cries of his famishing children, and seeing his young wife perishing before his eyes, was on the point of giving an indefinite oath to be and do whatever his employers should command. This they exacted of him before they would consent to relieve his misery, well knowing the importance, almost superstitious, that he would attach to his promises. Madame Laval had observed the wild and terrible expression that marked his countenance when he found her in his abode of sorrow, and the same cause elicited his strong emotion when, with tears of gratitude, he had fervently invoked a blessing on Constance as his benefactress and “an angel who had saved a family from death, and an immortal soul from perdition.”

But Victor Delorme was a dupe in a matter of more vital concernment to him.

Despairing of the acquisition of Mr. Belmont's millions by a union with his only daughter and heiress, the fertile genius of Dubourg contrived another scheme. His intimacy with Victor put him in possession of all the most important private affairs of the Comte de Visconti, who, with the characteristic negligence of an Italian noble, entrusted his estates to agents he supposed faithful, and passed his days in the elegant pursuits of literature and the arts.

The unprepossessing visitor who appeared during the reader's first introduction to Beatrice and her father, was no other than Dubourg, who had secured possession of the letter that Victor should have delivered in person, and made it a pretext for obtaining a view of the beautiful recluse.

From that moment his determination was formed. The prize was worthy the exercise of his subtlest ingenuity, his deepest art. He had already found means to expose the count to dangerous suspicions by his machinations. This was an important step in his plan. The proud noble would have submitted to any degradation rather than that of bestowing the hand of his daughter on such a man as Dubourg,

and this he well knew ; but there were means to overcome these scruples. If he could secure the hand of the signorina by any treachery, however base, he might hope in time to mitigate the indignation of the father, by removing the odium he had himself been secretly instrumental in casting upon him. He could restore him to prosperity, and thus present a claim not only to forgiveness, but gratitude.

But the heart sickens in the contemplation of a being so lost to humanity, as well as honour. Leaving him to revolve his dark scheme, we will continue our narrative.

The Comte de Visconti and his lovely daughter were still in possession of his residence in the Faubourg St. Germain, notwithstanding the apprehensions he had, without reserve, expressed to her of his failing fortunes, and the difficulties that beset his path, at home and abroad.

This was an inexplicable enigma to Beatrice, for she well knew her father's lofty sense of honour, that he never would incur debts which it would be impossible for him to discharge, and that the elegance, in which his establishment was continued, could not be justified but by the continuance of the ample means he had hitherto uninterruptedly enjoyed. Whenever she approached the subject, it was waived by the count, sometimes playfully, and at others so gravely that she feared to offend him by manifesting a degree of unbecoming curiosity in prosecuting her inquiries farther.

All her approaches to the theme, with which her thoughts were occupied, were evaded, sometimes abruptly even, when the manner in which they were at first received seemed to promise a satisfactory conclusion, and she almost resolved never to allude to it again, though her mind dwelt upon it earnestly and sadly.

Some mystery, she felt convinced, there was in the circumstances in which they were placed, for she perceived a certain anxiety on the part of the count to withdraw her yet more from observation ; and though her sojourn in the metropolis had been, to her, marked by no event of interest in society, as she had never appeared in the circle she seemed formed to adorn, her life was now completely that of a recluse. In the heart of the most brilliant metropolis of Europe, she knew nothing of its inhabitants, or of the gay scenes that were passing near and around her. Content with the simple pleasures to which only she had been accustomed, she needed not the delirious enjoyments of those whose days and nights followed each other in one continued round of time-destroying dissipation.

Yet there was a certain sadness in the solitude to which she often found herself consigned, and it was sometimes in vain that she sought the sweet influences of her music, her books, her flowers. The strains were of softest harmony, but they were only her own; the higher charm of poetry sometimes lost its power to captivate, and her flowers and birds served only to recall the recollection of her loved and regretted home.

"You are almost as pale to-day as that white robe you wear, my daughter," said the count to her one morning, as they sat together in his studio, after looking at her for some time with affectionate solicitude. "The white veil you threw negligently on, just now, when you were tending your flowers, made you quite a *dame blanche*, and, if properly arranged, would complete your resemblance to my fair Flora."

As he spoke, he threw the floating folds around her, and, arranging them with the hand of a finished artist, the resemblance between the beautiful original and the hardly less beautiful statue was complete. With a feeling of gratulation and pride the count surveyed alternately the peerless creation of an art which he had studied and practised with intense enthusiasm, and the lovely original in whom his fondest hopes and affections were centred.

"Both are perfect!" he said at length in an undertone, as if soliloquizing. "The time is well chosen for displaying them to the highest advantage. A princess may well be pardoned for her anxious desire to look on forms so faultless. Beatrice, my love," he continued aloud, "I have made perhaps a rash promise, and one for which I should ask your forgiveness."

"My forgiveness, dear father? then it must, indeed, be a strangely rash promise; but, whatever it may have been, you are assured, without a possibility of doubt, that I am ready to fulfil it, if there is anything in it which relates to me." And she looked up in his face with a confiding smile.

"Nay, Beatrice, I may ask more than you will find it easy to grant. It will require all your resolution to repress the curiosity natural to your sex and age, when I inform you that two visitors will honour you with their presence this morning, both of whom you will find elegant and attractive, and that while you will be permitted to form their acquaintance, their names will remain unknown to you. This is their request, and as it accords with my own wishes, you will, I feel assured, seek to know no more than I desire to communicate. A young lady, under the protection of her

brother, will make us this visit. The lady possesses a singular genius for the art of sculpture, which she has studied with the enthusiasm, and practises with the skill of an artist. She has heard both of my statue and the original, and anxiously desires to compare them. You will be yet more disposed to gratify her wish, when you learn that her father has been to me a friend so noble, so generous, that I would peril my life for him."

"It will then be a small sacrifice to peril my humility, my dear father," said Beatrice, smiling; "though I confess I have some dread of the effect of this flattering process upon my vanity. But your commands are laws for me, and your pleasure is mine. I cannot promise that the feeling of curiosity you so anxiously deprecate will remain entirely dormant in my mind, but, at least, it shall not be expressed."

"This is all I can ask or wish, my daughter," said the count; "but I hear the sound of wheels on the pavement of the court," and he hastily left the studio.

A rare condescension this for a haughty member of the ducal family of Milan. One part of the mystery was already solved, for Beatrice knew that her father would observe such ceremony only with persons of the highest rank. In a few minutes he re-entered, accompanied by the expected visitors.

The embarrassment which Beatrice naturally experienced immediately after the annunciation of the object of their visit by her father, and before she had entirely recovered from the surprise it had occasioned, was soon banished by their graceful ease and self-possession.

The lady was, as her father had described her, young and lovely. Eighteen summers had hardly shed their roses in her path; yet was there a pensive expression in her face that pictured thought beyond her years, though her dark eye beamed with sensibility and goodness. Her hair was simply parted on the thoughtful brow, and her attire, though in the purest taste, partook of the same simplicity. Her stature, though rather above the middle height, was contrasted with that of her brother, whose tall form bespoke command. An expression of calm dignity marked the quiet glance of his clear blue eye, a profusion of light brown hair shaded his fair forehead, and a slight moustache contrasted equally well with his fresh complexion. The regularity of his features corresponded well with his fine form, and both were enhanced by the elegance of his address, which united a becoming modesty with manly self-possession.

"You will pardon, I trust, the liberty we have taken," he said, as he advanced toward Beatrice with an air of respectful courtesy, "in availing ourselves of the permission of the Comte de Visconti to look at this beautiful specimen of his talent in the art of sculpture. My sister's passion for it is so well understood by her friends, that she enjoys privileges which would be denied to others."

"And yet another privilege she may hope to claim," added the lady with a winning smile, that chased away the habitually pensive expression of her face like a beam of sunshine in an April morning; "the privilege of forming an acquaintance with the lovely original."

As she spoke these words, with a captivating grace, she touched the blushing cheek of Beatrice with her lips.

"The resemblance between these miracles of nature and art is lessened by the roses I have unintentionally called forth," she continued, "but it does not render the original less charming. If my passion had been for the art of painting, instead of sculpture, I could not have used a more ingenious device to perfect a model I should have been too happy to possess."

Beatrice blushed yet more deeply; but how could she be offended at words of such courtly phrase, uttered by lips so fair, and in cadence so gentle?

Each word of her elegant visitors added to the charm of their conversation, and at the end of an hour, which had glided imperceptibly away, she found herself drawn towards them by a sympathy, which hearts and minds of youthful purity and refinement alone can fully appreciate.

"I am half tempted to part with my incognita," said the lady, looking at the count, as she rose to depart. "It is hardly fair to pronounce your name as I do, sweet Beatrice, without revealing my own. But you will pardon this mystery, as it meets with the approval of your father, and I hope you will sometimes think of me simply as —Marie."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONFESSION.

AN acquaintance so auspiciously begun was as happily continued. The visits of the young incognita were several times repeated, and each interview enhanced the respect and admiration Beatrice entertained for her.

The superior knowledge attained by the Comte de Visconti in her favourite art, and the delight she evidently took in his conversation and instructions in it ;—the pleasure with which she listened to the cultivated voice of Beatrice in song or in poetical recitations in her musical language, and above these, the interchange of thoughts of refined taste and delicacy which marked the sedulous care bestowed on the education of these lovely young persons, formed a bond of sympathy between them to last with life. Alas ! that one of these fair flowers should have been doomed to wither, when it had just expanded its bright blossoms of hope and promise !

It may be presumed that Beatrice felt a natural desire to penetrate the veil which concealed from her view the name and history of the gentle incognita ; but any manifestation of this feeling would have been a departure from the promise she had made on her first introduction to her, and her father seemed disposed to adhere to his own resolution on the subject, for it was one on which he never invited her to converse. His lightest word had always been her law ; and accustomed as she was to anticipate rather than to follow his instructions, she was content to enjoy the pleasure afforded her from this new and fruitful source, without seeking to dissipate the mystery that surrounded it.

Happy she was, also, to perceive that, since the auspicious day of her first acquaintance with her fair friend, the cloud on the brow of her father seemed to lessen. Though there were evidently cares on his mind, they were apparently less corroding, and arose more from the wayward conduct of Victor, whose revolutionary sentiments and schemes could not always be concealed from his kinsman, than from any immediate apprehension of danger to himself and his fortunes.

Beatrice was one morning in pleased anticipation of the visit which was to relieve her solitude, and had fallen into one of those pleasant day-dreams in which youth loves to indulge, when it was interrupted by the arrival of the young incognita.

"I shall not maintain this mystic guise much longer, Beatrice," she said, after they had passed an hour in their usually delightful manner. "Nor should I ever have assumed it, but for the desire I felt to form an acquaintance with one of whom I had heard a rapturous description. The young Count de Beaumanoir is one of our best friends. He possesses the esteem and confidence of my father and

family in a high degree; and at a time when he could speak with less reserve of you than circumstances now permit, I became acquainted with your virtues and accomplishments. I wished to judge for myself of the reality of his glowing picture, without the formality and etiquette which would have attended any other mode of introduction to you than that I have chosen. My object is now attained. I flatter myself that the ice of ceremony will never hereafter have power to raise a barrier between us, and I have exacted a promise from your father to present you to my parents soon, notwithstanding the determination he seems to have adopted to withdraw you at present from the world."

With these words, she took her leave with her wonted kindness.

The reverie interrupted by the visit of the incognita was resumed after she had departed. The thoughts of Beatrice naturally reverted to the subject on which her friend had delicately touched, and the warm commendation of the young Count de Beaumanoir brought a glow of pleasure to her cheek. Happily for Beatrice, for her well-being and future promise of life, the choice made for her by her father, in the manner understood and practised among the higher classes of continental Europe, had fallen upon one endowed with amiable qualities and accomplishments equal to her own,—one that she could love and trust.

Aware of the machinations that threatened the Comte de Visconti, Beaumanoir had resolved to unravel them, and his presence in Milan, the native city of the count, was necessary to the accomplishment of his purpose. During several months he had been absent on this mission, and it was at so propitious a time that Victor hoped to supplant him in the heart of Beatrice. What would have been his emotions had he known that a mind, deeper and darker than his own, was at work to render his plans futile, and was busily preparing still "a lower deep" for her than the one in which he would himself have plunged the object of his fond idolatry!

The portals of the court were hardly closed upon the chariot of the incognita, when Victor entered the studio, where Beatrice was still sitting.

Profiting by the confidence reposed in him by the Comte de Visconti, who, though he might have possessed judgment and penetration with regard to others, Victor well knew was blind to his faults, he did not dread his kinsman's *displeasure in coming an unbidden guest.*

The ingenuity of Beatrice had been exerted to the utmost to avoid all communication with him, except in the presence of her father, for her gentle nature shrunk from the idea of giving him pain, and she hoped that the silent reproof conveyed by avoiding him would be more efficacious in convincing him that his passion was hopeless, than any words from her could have been. There was, therefore, something of vexation mingled with the agitation she experienced in finding herself thus unexpectedly drawn into an interview with him. The feeling of vexation her womanly pride and dignity repressed,—her agitation she could not entirely conceal. Victor, with his accustomed penetration, detected both.

With an air of easy self-possession, he accosted her; touched lightly and gracefully on the topics which are usually discussed by transient visitors, and framed his discourse with such consummate art, that at the end of half an hour Beatrice was reassured.

Unconscious of the advantage afforded him by her own inexperience and his subtlety, she willingly yielded to the idea that she had judged him with too much severity,—that his declaration of a passion for her was only a momentary caprice,—or it might indeed have been feigned to afford him, as well as herself, a subject of diversion at a future day. The feeling of confidence and regard which she had been accustomed to accord to him in days past, returned, and she was now surprised that she could have looked upon his conduct in any other light than that of thoughtless indiscretion, attributable only to his waywardness, and not, as she had feared, to a dereliction of principle.

"You are, then, unacquainted with the name and rank of the lady I met on entering this morning," he said, after many light topics were exhausted. "If you have much curiosity on the subject, I think I can give you a clue by which you may make the discovery."

"I am quite satisfied with the pleasure I enjoy at present," replied Beatrice, "without trespassing on forbidden ground. It was her wish, as well as that of my father, that I should make no inquiry on these subjects at present. Some days hence, I am assured by the lady herself, that this mystery will be at an end. I suspect she only wished to prepare an agreeable surprise for me."

"And she has repeated these visits several times?" inquired Victor thoughtfully.

"Yes, several times;—recently under the protection of a

venerable lady, who seems merely a protectress, as she does not appear interested in her books, music, or conversation. The first time I saw her, she was accompanied by her brother."

"And you found the brother as charming as the sister?" said Victor, significantly.

"Yes, quite as charming," replied Beatrice with a smile, detecting the covert malice of his insinuation. "His face and form would do honour to majesty itself, while his manners are so gentle and winning, that a prince might envy their charm."

"Ah, Beatrice! you have lost your heart. This young hero of your story is doubtless in possession of it. But suppose, only to make the romance more interesting, that this elegant young man were by some magic converted into a prince—nay, into a king, or that your fair incognita should be suddenly transformed into a princess,—would it not greatly heighten your respect and admiration for them?"

"You do me injustice, Victor, in supposing that I attach an undue value to the external circumstances in which princes are placed. I acknowledge that there is a certain feeling in my mind of the respect due to 'princes and judges of the earth,' and that the sentiment of loyalty, when the sovereign who claims it is gifted with all the great qualities a king should possess, is high and ennobling."

"These sentiments, as a Visconti, you have naturally inherited from your father," said Victor, "but are you quite sure you would be guided by them in your judgment, if my hypothesis were to prove true?"

"The apparent virtues and accomplishments of the hero and heroine of my romance, as you are pleased to call it," replied Beatrice, "would be a guarantee for my sincerity; but even if I should find that a fairy wand had converted them into a king and a princess, which I do not anticipate, I should not admire them more. Indeed, I should regret it, for the respect due to their high rank would at once raise a barrier of etiquette around them, which I, with my youth and inexperience, could never venture to pass."

"They are indeed young, and fair as you have described them, Beatrice," said Victor, and a cloud passed over his brow, while a sigh, which he could not repress, was audible. 'It were sad to consign two such beings to irreparable misfortune,—perhaps to an early grave!'"

Beatrice looked up with surprise. There was a tone of *such deep sadness* in his words, and an expression so gloomy

and mysterious flitted over his features, as he uttered them, that he seemed to be speaking prophetic truth rather than sentiments of vague supposition. Startled by her inquiring glance, he resumed his lighter manner, though with some constraint.

"Have you no fears, then," he said, as if willing to change the subject, though conscious that he was entering on one still more embarrassing, "that I may assume the character of a spy, and report all you have told me of this elegant cavalier?"

"No, Victor, I have no fears that you will act an unworthy part," replied Beatrice, with an effort to feel the confidence she assumed, though her voice faltered, and she avoided the sad and earnest look that she perceived in the eyes which she dreaded to meet, notwithstanding the careless tone he had, until that moment, preserved.

"If you have no fears, Beatrice," he said in a low voice, and approaching her more nearly, "and if your feelings for me have undergone no change, give me your hand in token of undiminished friendship."

She gave the hand frankly and cordially, but her eyes were still cast down, and it trembled as he clasped it in his and led her to a seat. Her agitation became yet more painful when he knelt before her and bowed his forehead on that hand. He raised his head, and she was shocked at the wild expression that flashed over his pale features.

"Beatrice!" he exclaimed, "my life is in your hands: oh, do not thus turn away from me! To you I have looked as the guardian angel who would lead me in the paths of honour. Without that angelic guardianship, I may be lost to all that can claim the name. Tell me that you do not spurn the love that consumes my heart!"

"Victor," she replied mournfully, "I believed that this wild dream had long since been dissipated. You wrong yourself and me in thus urging a suit which can bring only sorrow and blame to both."

"No, no!" he returned passionately, and catching a ray of hope from her gentle and subdued manner, "there will be neither sorrow nor blame, if you love me. I will endure all that can arise from the fulfilment of that beautiful dream. Be mine, Beatrice, and my destiny will be happiness and honour!"

"Victor," said Beatrice, "your words are strange and dark, and I know not what terrible mystery is involved in the language you hold. Some fatal influence is at work to be-

wilder your perception of truth and justice. Bid the tempter depart!" she continued, rising, as he spoke, with an air of dignity and self-possession that a noble resolution could alone have inspired at such a moment. "Be yourself, Victor, as I once knew you before a delusive passion obscured your judgment, and happiness and honour will more surely be yours than if this baseless vision had been realized."

"You cast me from you, then?" said Victor, rising and folding his arms over his breast, as if to still the wild throbbings of the rebellious heart within, while his manner became as lofty as her own.

"Those harsh words are yours, not mine, Victor," said Beatrice, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke. "My feelings for you are unchanged. I would be, as I have ever been to you, a sister. You well know that all you demand farther than this, is given to another."

"Your hand I know is promised by your father," said Victor, "but your heart"—

"Was won before that promise was made," said Beatrice, blushing deeply, while the words faltered on her lips, "and that promise will be fulfilled with my own consent."

"Then is the bright dream indeed dispelled!" said Victor, while a mortal paleness overspread his features. "The vexed spirit is banished, and will never more haunt you. Farewell!"

He turned, and before she could reply, he was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CARNIVAL.

THE last day of the carnival had arrived. The mammoth ox, garlanded with flowers, preceded by a band of music and followed by a car which might have passed for that of the goddess of reason and her satellites, judging from the group within it, had passed through every quarter of the metropolis, and had at last laid down his life literally, as other great actors do figuratively, for the amusement of the admiring crowd.

His eager followers, who had anticipated the catastrophe as do the hungry heirs of a miser when the hoards of gold they have watched and worshipped are about to be distributed, claimed and received their portions of his spoils the *more eagerly*, because this one day of riotous enjoyment was

to sum up their pleasures and give them one prize against forty blanks, while with many of the bustling throng the feast was only an annual one, and its rarity enhanced their anxiety to partake of it.

The Boulevards and the Champs Elysées presented a curious spectacle in the slowly moving files of carriages of every description, some filled with revellers in grotesque masks with noses of preposterous length, women covered with paint, patches, and ribbons, children in wigs, and girls in regimentals and epaulettes, boys and girls alike disguised *en pierrot*, with faces plastered with flour, and in their high-pointed white caps and white dresses, looking like the ghosts of the carnival gliding about in anticipation of its speedy demise.

The maskers who ventured on foot among the dense masses that crowded the sides of the streets, were often received with shouts of derision, and occasionally something more substantial than sugar-plums found a place in the showers hurled at them by their companions in this rude pastime.

The gens d'armes, stationed at intervals along the streets, received maledictions both loud and deep, when some obstruction of the passage rendered their interference necessary, and occasionally a drawn sword was seen flashing over the heads of the multitude. Still the mighty mass moved on, and if accidents occurred, they were soon forgotten in the tumultuous excitement of the scene and the day.

The Princess V—— had made every exertion to secure an earlier day than *Mardi-gras* for her fancy ball, which was to unite all that art could invent or luxury display; for this day of universal riot was one of such incessant commotion among the lower classes, as to make it particularly unsuitable for her purpose. But other fêtes had claimed the precedence over hers, and she had been compelled to avail herself of the last day of the carnival for her splendid entertainment.

Couturières and modistes, plumassiers and fleurists, jewellers and embroiderers had plied their busy hands for a month past in preparing the varied and magnificent costumes which were to grace the occasion. How many pale artists were toiling daily and nightly at their sickly trade for a scanty subsistence, ill paid for their labours, or alas! too often not paid at all, while decorating the glittering robes that were to cover many an aching heart! What anxiety was suffered by the elegant hostess and her elegant

guests, while preparations were in progress, on both sides, for entertaining and being entertained! What vexations and disappointments had to be endured from faithless "*paroles d'honneur*," or soothing exhortations to be "*tranquille*" under the heart-rending failure of an unfinished piece of embroidery or an incomplete costume!

All these whirlpools and quicksands had been escaped by the happy mariners who remained quietly in port, while the storm of gaiety was thus raging furiously without.

The young friends of Constance, some of whom had shared in the bitterness of disappointment from faithless promises, and were compelled to content themselves with a simpler costume than the one they had fancied and ordered, secretly commended her choice in giving up the anticipated fête, and could not help admiring an example which they had not resolution enough to follow.

The sacrifice made by Constance, in dedicating her costume to the relief of the unfortunate Antoine and his family, had lost in her eyes whatever of merit it might have claimed, as the enthusiasm of Madame Laval had induced her to speak of it to all her acquaintance, notwithstanding the entreaties of her pupil to preserve silence on the subject, when her seeming caprice in declining the invitation to the fancy ball should be mentioned.

To indemnify her for her disappointment, which her friends imagined much more severe than it really was, they promised to call, on their way to the entertainment of the Princess V—, to show her the effect of the splendid costumes they had selected, before they should be merged in the glittering crowd assembled at the fancy ball.

Mrs. Melville and her daughter, on this eventful evening, when the whole metropolis presented a scene of universal and uproarious gaiety, were quietly seated in an elegantly furnished parlour. A wood fire, as bright, though not so ample, as those they had been accustomed to at this season when they were in their own loved home, was blazing on the hearth, and the room was abundantly illuminated with wax lights to give the full effect of the expected costumes.

Constance was trying, for the first time, the keys of a new and exquisite pianoforte which Mr. Melville had ordered for her on their arrival in the metropolis, and which he had purposely directed to be brought in on this day, that the evening which he supposed his daughter might have looked forward to as one of regret and disappointment, should be distinguished by a pure and rational, as well as an unusual, degree of enjoyment.

The beautiful instrument responded well to the fairy fingers that flew over its keys. The crescendo and diminuendo rose and fell with the power and sweetness of the human voice. The higher notes were flute-like,—the deep-chords of the bass resembled those of the church organ. It was tried, in every variety of music, by the happy young possessor of the long-coveted treasure. "From grave to gay, from lively to severe," composer followed composer, and the magical instrument seemed to have been made expressly for every different style.

"Those new variations are brilliant and striking," said Mrs. Melville, as Constance concluded a favourite piece; "but there is something in the air that awakens old memories and associations in my mind. I think I have heard it before."

"I do not doubt it," said Constance laughing, "though you would be unwilling, notwithstanding your modest dread of appearing more youthful than you really are, to be considered a contemporary of the ancient author. Beethoven and Mozart are as palpably copied by modern composers as Dante was by Milton; but, like the great poet, they have often improved so much upon the original that it would be unjust to call them plagiarists. How I wish Evelyn was here," she continued, to play this charming duet with me! she would enjoy my new piano as much as I do."

"I should be only too happy if your wish could be realized, my child," said Mrs. Melville, "though we must wait some months longer for the pleasure we anticipate in welcoming back our loved absentees. Vivian and Evelyn, judging from the letters we received this morning, are highly amused with the Neapolitan carnival, which, from all accounts, is much more interesting than it is here. But the bell announces our costumés. Who comes first?"

The question was answered by the triumphal entrance of the white-plumed Henry of Navarre, arrayed in regal splendour, and supporting on his arm a Peruvian princess of rare beauty. Her dress was so artistically and completely adorned with brilliantly-coloured feathers, that she looked like some tropical bird just ready to take wing. Her rich black hair floated loosely over her shoulders, and was adorned, as well as her neck, arms, and ankles, with a profusion of massive gold ornaments, such as an Indian princess might be supposed to possess.

Hardly had this pair received their well-deserved tribute of admiration, when a lady entered dressed as a Turkish sultana. The gold tissue of her robe, the rich colours

the grotesque figures embroidered on it, resembling gems rather than silk, the costly jewels, and above all the miniature of the sultan surrounded by diamonds, which she wore as a noble would wear an order, attested her rank. Her young nephew, arrayed in barbaric pomp, with his face painted black, followed her as an Eastern slave, carrying a plateau, on which were piled a large number of Persian curiosities, to be distributed among the friends of the charming sultana. Well she became the character she personated; for, though a Greek by birth, the sultan would have been too happy to see her fair round form and splendid Oriental eyes among his Turkish beauties.

Next came the *Bergères Pompadours*, attended by several young marquises, attired in the graceful, though pompously elaborate dress of the Louis Quinze style. A slight, very slight sigh escaped the lips of Constance, as she looked admiringly at these youthful beauties. Was it for her own disappointment? or that the embroidered velvet coats and point-lace ruffles reminded her that she had been instrumental, though innocently, in depriving Reginald of the pleasure he might have enjoyed in the brilliant scene where they were to be displayed. But the feeling was momentary, and she blushed at the thought of attributing such weakness to him, when she found it so easy to console herself.

Her reflections, if such transient thoughts could be dignified with the name, were interrupted by the departure of the first costumés, who were impatient to appear on the scene of their anticipated triumphs, and the entrance of two more, attired as were the *Bergères Pompadours*, in a style half-regal, half-peasant,—the picturesque dress of Spanish contrabandiers.

Madame de St. Clair, in this gay and becoming costume, looked many years younger than she really was. She was accompanied by a handsome young man, whose dark moustache and complexion accorded well with his brilliant and striking dress, and whom she presented to Mrs. Melville and her daughter.

"The Vicomte Alvares," she said, "has been unfortunately compelled to delay his visit to the metropolis until the very last day of our gay season. I fear the specimen we are about to show him of our elegant society this evening, will only increase his regret for what he has lost."

"You are mistaken, fair contrabandista," said the young vicomte, fixing his dark eyes on the face of Constance, who blushed deeply at his assured look of admiration.

"You are quite mistaken. There are charms in this great metropolis independent of revelry and masquerades."

Constance felt pained and offended by the broad flattery of his words, and the bold look that accompanied them. But there was nothing in either that she could with propriety resent. Madame de St. Clair perceived her embarrassment, and came to her relief.

"Your remark is just," she said, smiling; "but, as our society is constituted here, charms must be fully matured before their value is entirely appreciated. Miss Melville will become better acquainted with the power of hers, when she claims the title of madame."

The Vicomte Alvares turned his eyes from the face of Constance to that of Madame de St. Clair. There was an expression in them half comic, half ironical, as she replied, "Yes, I learn that in Parisian society young ladies of sixteen are infants, and mothers are—no mothers at all. But what have I said, madame, that makes you blush so furiously? One would suppose that the circumstances I mention were applicable to yourself, if your youth and beauty did not preclude such an idea."

"You seem to have made a vocation of raising blushes on fair cheeks this evening," said Madame de St. Clair, affecting to laugh, and apparently suspicious of some covert meaning in his words, though flattered by the compliment to her youth and beauty. "Your ladies of the court of Madrid must be accustomed to language more flattering than ours."

"When the jealous grille and the envious mantilla permit, we are accustomed to devour with our eyes the charms we only dare celebrate in our serenades," said the vicomte, again turning a look of undisguised admiration upon Constance. "But why should youth and beauty be excluded from participation in the enjoyment of pleasures more suited to their years than to those of persons of maturer age? Is there not some danger that if they are too much restrained, they may end by escaping from all bounds? Since my brief sojourn here, I have been informed that there is a person now in this city calling himself the Chevalier Kriminelski, who, though he has never been seen in polite society, has rendered himself as celebrated as Don Giovanni,—that, he has carried off no less than three young damsels, who were detained, as they considered it, in 'durance vile' by fashionable mothers and governautes. They have thus wisely exchanged Scylla for Charybdis, or, as your English author elegantly

translates Le Sage in the Spanish story, the scene of which we may at least claim as ours, they have 'jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire.'

During this speech Madame de St. Clair had looked fur- tively and uneasily at Mrs. Melville and Constance, and again at the Vicomte Alvares, as if to assure herself that his remark were not designed to apply to her, as well as to observe the impression made by his words.

"In such events," said Mrs. Melville, endeavouring to withdraw the attention of the vicomte from Madame de St. Clair, as she perceived the unpleasant feelings apparently excited by his remarks, "it would be difficult to decide which should be most commiserated—the unhappy victims of this often-repeated treachery, or the bereaved parents."

"Oh, as to the bereaved parents," said the vicomte, laughing, and glancing maliciously at Madame de St. Clair, "it might in some instances be a relief. But I understand they do not grieve hopelessly, or indeed a very long time, on account of the bereavement, for the Chevalier Kriminelski always takes care to bring the damsels back again to their loving parents, who are doubtless overjoyed to receive them after an absence so unusual and so unexpected."

"You have selected a singularly unpleasant subject for a jest, Monsieur le Vicomte Alvares," said Madame de St. Clair, with a lowering brow, and speaking in a tone of suppressed anger. "Our society will be little obliged by a repetition of anecdotes which reflect the deepest humiliation and degradation upon it. If our fashionable mothers do not affect a tenderness for their daughters which might be deemed pretty and becoming, they have at least pride enough to save themselves from disgrace."

The vicomte either did not, or affected not to notice this rebuke. He rose and walked to the piano near which Constance was seated. Carelessly running one hand over the keys with a skill and grace that showed a perfect mastery of the instrument, he took a sheet of music from the stand.

"This is a pretty duet," he said, humming the air, "have you tried it yet? pray allow me the honour of playing it with you."

"Pardon me," said Constance, unwilling to encourage such familiarity in a stranger, "I have never played it, and I should probably embarrass you by making some mistake in the time."

"Oh, never fear," he replied, "that would only make our *performance* more amusing; it would give us something to

laugh at. Let me beg"—and he offered to take her hand to lead her to the piano. But Constance declined resolutely, and determined, at the earliest moment allowed her, to escape from his persevering attentions by making an excuse to leave the room.

Mrs. Melville, who relished the familiar ease of the vicomte as little as did her daughter, anticipated her wish by a request that she would go in search of some materials for the continuation of a piece of tapestry, the convenient parlour apology for work, that was lying on a table near her.

Too happy to avail herself of her mother's suggestion, Constance was gliding from the room, when to her surprise the Vicomte Alvares intercepted her retreat by placing himself suddenly before the door through which she was about to make her escape.

"Forgive me, Miss Melville," he said earnestly. "I perceive that I have unintentionally offended you. Let me pray you not to be so cruel as to leave us. I entreat,—I implore,—thus humbly."

To the increased astonishment of Constance, he threw himself on one knee, and folded his arms over his breast, looking up at her with a devotion more appropriate for a worshipper of the Virgin in a Spanish cathedral than that of one mere mortal to another. The effect was so ridiculous that Constance, notwithstanding her vexation, could not help laughing. But the doorway was effectually barred, and she was compelled to return to her seat.

"As you will not consent to do anything for my amusement," said the vicomte, following her, "permit me at least to contribute to yours. I perceive, among those pieces of music, a pretty Spanish dance, one of the forty most celebrated of those gayest and most charming ones that are the delight of Andalusia. May I beg the favour of you to play it? and with Madame de St. Clair as my partner, I will dance it for you."

"Most willingly," said Constance, seating herself at the piano, and happy that any compromise was proposed. "But will Madame de St. Clair agree to oblige you?"

"Oh, it will not give her much trouble," replied the vicomte, "as I shall be the chief performer. She will hardly have to dance at all. She will only receive with becoming grace and *empressement* the attentions bestowed on her by her cavalier."

As he spoke, he produced a pair of castanets from the folds of the crimson silk scarf that was twisted around his waist,

the time with them, as Constance played over the piano to him selected.

"Cavalier," he exclaimed, "Your touch is perfection! In consequence that the piano is placed in such a position that you can enjoy our dance, for I assure you that you will pronounce it well worth looking at."

The prediction of the Vicomte Alvares was fully verified, for the dance was graceful and animated, and he executed his part of it with the skill and agility of an opera dancer. Now springing from side to side, now wheeling around the lady to whom his gestures of admiration and devotion were designed by the figure of the dance to be addressed, with the motion of a bird on the wing, then kneeling before her, throwing up his arms, and swaying to and fro, while the merry castanets, in perfect accordance with the music, added their inspiring accompaniment to it.

As the dance drew to its conclusion, just at the final bar, the cavalier completed his part of the entertainment, to the dismay of Constance, by suddenly throwing his arm round Madame de St. Clair's waist, and then, drawing her to him, he pressed his moustached lip to her cheek, and as an echo to the last chord, plumped a resounding and unequivocal kiss on her lips!

Constance started from her chair in amazement and disgust, and Mrs. Melville, seriously offended at such a daring infringement on all the rules of good manners as well as good morals, was about to express her decided disapprobation of the unwarrantable conduct of the vicomte, when Madame de St. Clair laughingly extricated herself from the embrace.

"Come!" she said, "this is indeed carrying the jest too far. I shall be compelled to explain it, as I perceive that Mrs. Melville is really vexed by your nonsense. You will not, I trust," she continued, addressing herself to that lady, "condemn me entirely when I assure you that the Vicomte Alvares is no other than—Almeria Belmont."

Mrs. Melville and Constance could hardly believe the evidence of their senses, so perfect had been the disguise, so perfectly had the assumed character been represented. Mrs. Melville still indulged a secret suspicion that the character of Almeria was the feigned, and that of the Vicomte Alvares the real, one.

Their doubts were resolved by the entrance of a servant with a card.

"Mr. Reginald Villiers—at home?—Certainly," said Mrs. Melville. "Ask him to walk up."

The pretended vicomte turned deadly pale, and trembled with such visible agitation, that the woman was seen at once beneath her masculine disguise.

"Oh, heavens!" she exclaimed, seizing Mrs. Melville's hand, "do not, I entreat you, dear madam, do not betray me! I know well the horror I should inspire, if Mr. Villiers were to recognise me in this unfeminine disguise. Promise me, oh! promise me," she said wildly, and appealing alternately to Mrs. Melville and Constance, "that you will not betray me!"

"On one condition," said Mrs. Melville.

"Any condition!" exclaimed Almeria.

"Well, my condition is that you return home, and substitute some other costume for this one so entirely foreign to every idea of womanly propriety. Trust me, my dear Miss Belmont, you were about to make a sad mistake in giving such a theme for the tongue of scandal."

"Most gladly do I accept the terms," said Almeria, "and I leave Madame de St. Clair as a hostage for their fulfilment while I return home for the purpose. The metamorphosis shall be effected, and I can return within an hour."

Distasteful as the proposition was to Madame de St. Clair, there was no alternative, for the arrangements had been made by Almeria, and the equipage, which served them both for the occasion, was hers.

Reginald entered, as the pretended Vicomte Alvares bowed himself out. The deceit was quite as successful as it had been with Mrs. Melville and Constance. Reginald only returned with civility the bow of the young coxcomb, as he supposed him, and bestowed not another thought upon him.

Music and conversation filled up the hour of Almeria's absence so pleasantly, that even Madame de St. Clair was surprised when the bell announced her return.

To assure Mrs. Melville of her good faith, Almeria did not content herself with sending up a messenger to her friend, but came in person to the parlour to seek her.

The dress for which she had exchanged her brilliant Spanish costume, if less becoming, was still more rich, and certainly far more appropriate to her sex. The guise of a fortune-teller, which she had adopted, admitted of any and every ornament, provided symbols of magical art were used to a sufficient extent in its decorations, and these had not been spared. Egyptian hieroglyphics, and all that was odd, or mysterious, had been exhausted on it, and the costume,

in its way, was quite as perfect as the one she had first appeared in, for several had been successfully tried before the eventful evening arrived.

Reginald joined in the commendations bestowed upon the felicitous choice of her costume. Almeria thanked him with gentle timidity for the compliment he paid to her taste.

"I am so much indebted to you," she said, "for this amiable commendation, that I will reward you for it."

With the golden wand, the sceptre of her magic power, she drew a charmed imaginary circle around him.

"You are now," she continued, "within the influence of my spells. Beware how you attempt to break through them, lest some mischief befall you.

'I charm thy life
From the weapons of strife,
From stone and from wood,
From fire and from flood,
From the serpent's tooth,
And the beast of blood!'

Reginald caught the end of the golden wand as it was again circling around him.

"I cannot permit you to finish your incantation," he said, "lest your magical charm, which begins with the fairest promise, should terminate with the direst malediction that the fertile brain of a poet ever imagined. I hope you are content, as I am, to leave it as it is."

The lateness of the hour warned him, as well as the costumés, that *Mardi gras* was drawing to a close, and that it was time to depart. When the morning of Ash Wednesday arrived, it may be surmised who, if they thought an apology for the omission necessary, had headaches to plead as a reason for their absence from the church services, and who had not.

CHAPTER XIX.

LONGCHAMPS.

THE abbey founded by Isabella of France, sister of St. Louis, has long since been numbered among the legendary places of the past. The melodious voices of its nuns, the chief attraction to the splendid and fashionable visitors who resorted to it in the days of Passion Week, when they *chantered the lamentations* and the *tenebræ*, have long since

been hushed in the deep stillness that will never more be awakened by them, and the places "that knew them, now know them no more."

The abbey itself has crumbled into dust, and strangers are naturally led to inquire the meaning of the long and glittering files of elegant equipages that are still seen, at the same period of the year, wending their way through the Champs Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne to the spot, where once the sweet voices were heard resounding, in sacred song, in the chapel of the abbey.

The very name of *Longchamp*, once exclusively appropriated to the abbey, has changed its signification, for, instead of being recognized as the object of a religious procession, the annual visit to the spot is now anticipated by the rich and fashionable only as the first gay promenade of the early spring, when new vehicles, new liveries, new horses, and new dresses can be displayed to the greatest advantage, and in brilliant and never-ending rivalry.

The severity of the winter, unprecedented as it had been, was now felt no more. Spring was advancing, and the eager expectants of their promised display were gratified by a few soft sunny days, which seemed to come with their balmy influences to banish all remembrance of the "blackness of darkness," which had reigned with undisputed sway over the past season.

Long files of new and splendid equipages were seen advancing on one side of the Champs Elysées and returning on the other; while the royal cortège was dashing through the centre, followed by that of the Duke of Orleans, the gay scarlet and gold-laced liveries of his numerous attendants flaming in the sunlight; and these succeeded by ambassadors and ministers, home and foreign, among the latter Russia, Austria, and Prussia, distinguished by their *chasseurs* with the idealized hunting costume, arrayed in green and gold, with waving forests of green plumes rising high above the calèches they ornamented rather than attended.

The scene was one of enjoyment to observers and observed, for nature and art seemed combined to render it pleasing to both. The warmth of the sun had brought out all that was new and *recherché* in spring costumes, and the open calèches and elegantly appointed carriages passed along in almost endless procession. The splendours of approaching summer added to the general effect, and the richly appavelled occupants of the numerous equipages appeared to derive animation from the manifold beauties of the scene. They chatted, and con-

versed, made remarks first upon this novelty and then upon that, while each sign that spoke of the advent of a more genial season received its particular recognition. There is something peculiarly interesting in such an assemblage of the rich and the fashionable, escaping as it were from the vast prison in which so much of their time is spent in a rigid observance of the arbitrary rules and conventional usages of society. They bring with them all the state and magnificence possible into the fair domains of nature, as if unwilling to leave behind that which is, or at any rate appears to be, to them so precious.

In one of the numerous equipages passing in the glittering throng sat two ladies with whom my readers are by this time well acquainted,—Almeria Belmont and Madame de St. Clair. For some time they both preserved silence, as if entirely absorbed in the novelty of the scene. At last Almeria rose in her seat, breaking the spell that held her entranced, and, after regarding her companion for some moments with fixed attention, said: "Do you know that I wish to ask you what you may deem a strange favour; and yet it is one with which you can very easily comply?"

"How provokingly droll," returned Madame de St. Clair, withdrawing her gaze from the surrounding country. "I suppose, however, that it will not cost me any great sacrifice to grant it."

"That you can best understand when you learn the nature of the request. At any rate it will put to the test, that which is always considered woman's weakest point—your curiosity," continued Almeria, making an effort to treat the matter lightly; "but," she resumed with more gravity, "I will come to the point at once. In case you should, in the course of to-day or to-morrow, receive a note in my handwriting, I ask you as a favour to restore it to me without reading it."

"Wherefore write to me that which you are unwilling that I should peruse?" said Madame de St. Clair, with an inquiring glance.

"That is not the question," replied Almeria. "Grant that it is a caprice, one of those whims to which our sex are said to be prone; in fact, put what construction you will upon my request. The real point at issue is, will you do me the favour which I ask?"

"Certainly," answered Madame de St. Clair, smiling, "as *it is becoming a serious matter, though, in good truth, I am very perplexed to unravel the mystery. However, as I per-*

ceive that you desire to keep that all to yourself, I will make no further attempt to withdraw the veil."

Almeria expressed her thanks at the compliance of her friend, and, after a few casual remarks, intended to neutralize the effects of the rather strange demand she had made, relapsed into silence.

The ladies conversed no more during the remainder of the drive. Whether lost in the contemplation of the new and refreshing scenes around them, or thinking over the little incident in their rather silent excursion, they sat wrapt in their own meditations, as if each felt unwilling to disturb her companion's reflections even by a single syllable.

One is, naturally enough, anxious to ascertain what could possibly have induced Almeria to propose so strange a request, and yet very few would have sufficient sagacity to divine the actual truth. Nothing less than the tender passion had prompted Almeria. She was rich, proud, haughty; but love could bend even her spirit. True, she did not give way to her feelings, as more genial natures might do; the wound in her heart brought forth not all its balm, but more of its bitterness, yet her resolution became fixed. In her it might be, and indeed was, a mere caprice, but one, for all that, which she determined to satisfy. Such natures do not accomplish their aims by half measures: they go directly at the object in view, and if they miss the mark it is not from want of energy and boldness. Accustomed from an early age to have every wish gratified, she could not brook disappointment. Hers was not a disposition calculated to receive anything like a permanent impression; love of self had obtained too strong a hold of her heart to admit of a rival. In such a soil the commonplace affections of human life seldom take deep root. Yet if a selfish person is ever surprised into love, the passion becomes, if not more deep, far more dangerous than it ever is in an unsophisticated heart. She had been accustomed to unlimited power, to the indulgence of every caprice, to the gratification of every wish, however absurd or impossible it might at first be deemed. The difficulty of attaining any object stimulated her genius in its acquisition, and her fertile resources of wealth and talent had so far sufficed to bring every admirer that she had fancied within the sphere of her influence.

As far as her worldly and selfish nature could be said to love, Almeria loved Reginald. Her hatred was a passion far less equivocal, and she hated Constance. Reginald and Constance were alike unconscious of her love and hatred, and

her, and her splendours, and her unknown schemes with profound indifference, neither of them ever bestowing a thought upon her.

Almeria well knew that Reginald did not suspect the feeling she entertained for him. The daring plan she had revolved in her mind would, if any such suspicion had existed, been liable to failure. Her present object was to prevent him by any means, however disingenuous, from continuing those devoted attentions to Constance, which threw a blight over her existence, and to convince him, if possible, that his passion for her was hopeless.

Almeria's scheme will be understood by the circumstance that the mysterious letter alluded to in her conversation with Madame de St. Clair during their drive to Longchamps, instead of being sent directly to Madame de St. Clair, was found by Reginald on his table the next day. The envelope of this letter was addressed to himself, and he unsuspectingly read it from beginning to end, before he perceived that its contents were designed for another. With the handwriting he was entirely unacquainted, and therefore perused with no little astonishment the following epistle:—

“As it may amuse you, my dear friend, to have some account of the soirée of Lady Augusta, at which I was sorry not to find you last evening, I will give you a brief history of some of my adventures.

“I was on that occasion presented to her nephew, Captain Delamere, an English officer, and one of the handsomest men I ever saw. From a conversation I heard between Captain Delamere and Lady Augusta, I infer that he is the accepted lover of Miss Melville. They have been engaged to be married for a year past, as he met with her and paid his addresses to her last year, when he visited the happy continent where all your admiration and affections are centred. I could not have supposed that one so young and lovely as Miss Melville would act a part so disingenuous as to conceal this engagement from all the world, and thus entangle other hearts, as she seems to be doing here at present.

“I have many more odd things to relate, but I am very busy sending off cards of invitation for a musical soirée, and have not time this morning to add more. [over—

“Lady Augusta has the loveliest little king Charley in the world.

“Ever yours, ALMERIA BELMONT.
 “Madame de St. Clair.”

The address and signature on the page "over," separated as they were from its contents, gave a simple and obvious explanation of the mystery of this letter by disclosing its origin and destination.

Reginald could not be blamed for reading it, which he had done before he perceived the mistake he had made. It had doubtless, as he supposed, been hastily put in an envelope intended to cover an invitation for him to the *soirée musicale* mentioned in the letter, while the invitation for him was, by a corresponding mistake, put into an envelope bearing the address of Madame de St. Clair.

He wrote a line of apology to Madame de St. Clair, and had just despatched it, when a breathless messenger arrived from Miss Belmont, to inform Mr. Villiers that a mistake had occurred in sending him an invitation that morning for a *soirée*. Miss Belmont begged the favour of Mr. Villiers to return the note addressed to him, as it had been designed for Madame de St. Clair, and an invitation to the *soirée* was sent as a substitute.

But the subtle poison had done its work, and Reginald felt as if a dagger had been planted in his heart. In vain he tried to shake off the impression made by the words he had just read. The world was always full of idle reports—the writer of the note was unworthy, in his estimation, to breathe the name he considered almost profaned by being mentioned in a letter from her to her friend. But what motive could she have but the love of gossip for inventing such a tale?—and then, was it her invention, or was it indeed a terrible reality?

The doubt was too painful,—it must be resolved,—he would inquire. Then came a thousand perplexing thoughts. His acquaintance with Constance was too recent to ask questions that would resolve these doubts, if he made the inquiry only a matter of friendly interest, and it would be hazardous all his hopes to be precipitate in the declaration of his passion. He well knew that one so delicate and refined could not "unsought be won," and that a preference on her part for him must be founded not only on gratitude for his love for her, but on solid esteem ripened gradually into a deeper sentiment.

It was with no small degree of anxiety that he counted the minutes that would elapse before the hour of one o'clock, at which time he had been informed by them, that Mrs. and Miss Melville would visit the gallery of the Louvre to inspect a new painting recently added to the collection there.

How heavily those minutes passed! At length the wished, the dreaded hour arrived. Reginald drove to the Louvre.

The Louvre was thronged with distinguished visitors, the privilege of entrance having been restricted for the occasion, and the part of the gallery in which the new painting was placed was filled to overflowing. Reginald was compelled to move forward slowly to the spot where Mrs. Melville and Constance were seated together on one of the small banquettes provided for persons fatigued by their artistic researches through the long galleries.

Constance looked more lovely than ever in a white hat adorned with a few rose-buds within, rivalling the delicate carnation of her complexion. More than one admirer of the beautiful in art paused to glance at a face lovelier in its natural charms than any the glowing canvas could offer them.

Just as Reginald was about to emerge from the crowd, a handsome military man stepped forward, and, approaching Mrs. and Miss Melville, paid his compliments with the ease of an old acquaintance.

"Captain Delamere!" exclaimed Constance, offering him her hand with a smile of welcome that beamed in her expressive eyes; "this is quite an unexpected pleasure!"

If Reginald had not been prepared by the fiend of jealousy to see everything through the optics of the green-eyed monster, he would have detected nothing in this salutation but an innocent expression of pleasure at this unexpected meeting with a person associated with pleasant thoughts of home and friends. But it was enough that the beaming smile was not for him,—Almeria had then told the truth,—Captain Delamere was a favoured lover, and Reginald was—not himself.

Certainly—for, under other circumstances, he would have been too ingenuous to suspect deceit, too noble to suspect meanness, too amiable to form uncharitable surmises, too sensible to do foolish things. Yet what cannot love and jealousy, when united, as they were with him, effect? He was too much in love, and too jealous, to reason. He felt as if the charm of his existence had been suddenly annihilated!

The remainder of the hours that succeeded this unpropitious meeting were passed in uncertain musing; and a night's rest deserves not the name, when not a moment of *the whole night* has been passed in quiet oblivion of the *events of the day*. Reginald rose from his sleepless pillow

the morning after he had first seen Captain Delamere, resolving that he would risk everything, and dispel the doubts that robbed him of his peace.

The hour for visiting arrived, and he drove to Mr. Melville's hotel. As his carriage was about to enter the *porte cochère*, he saw Captain Delamere enter the house. Hastily inscribing a P. P. C. on his card, he left it with the porter and drove off.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

IN a small but richly-furnished parlour of a house in one of the most retired streets leading from the Champs Elysées toward the Barrière du Roule, sat a personage,—she shall not be dignified with the title of lady, though her rich dress might, at the first glance, have deceived a more than casual observer into the belief that she was entitled to that appellation. There was a soft, purring, cat-like air about her, well calculated to heighten the deceit.

She was attired apparently for a morning drive; and a velvet dress, and a hat of the same colour and material, ornamented with mingled ostrich and soft marabout feathers, a large palatine and muff of zibeline sable, and a deep border of the same costly fur around the skirt of the dress, showed that no expense had been spared in its adornment.

The morning was cold for the spring, as this care of her health, in the anticipated exposure of a morning drive, attested, and a small fire was burning in the hearth, from which her face was sheltered by a silken screen that depended from the mantel. She was reclining, rather than sitting, upon a small velvet *causeuse*, and absorbed in the perusal of one of those poisonous works of a perverted imagination with which the circulating libraries of the metropolis were unhappily rife.

She started, when a hand was unexpectedly laid upon the book, though it was done in the soft, cat-like manner resembling her own, and the voice that accompanied the action was modulated to her own purring tones. The person who had thus intruded upon her solitude was apparently not unexpected, for as soon as she had recovered from her surprise, she greeted him with a smile of welcome.

"I thought you had forgotten me this morning, Auguste," she said in her softest manner, "notwithstanding the pro-

mise I exacted from you so prettily last evening, according to our compact, to pay me a fraternal visit to-day. I have been trying to beguile the time with this entertaining book. Ah, why am I so weak as to rely so much for my happiness upon a brother, a step-brother it is true, but still one so beloved, yet so capricious as Auguste Dubourg?"

She put a delicately laced and embroidered handkerchief to her eyes as she spoke.

"Madeleine," said Dubourg, changing his tone from the flattering one in which he had accosted her, "I have no time at present for playing the part of the affectionate brother, which has so often served our purposes that we must rehearse it sometimes in private, in order that our performance may be more effective, when our interests demand its display elsewhere. We understand each other too well to act such a farce, except when it is necessary to make dupes of others; here we have no witnesses; I have come this morning to speak the truth."

"Well," returned Madeleine, changing her voice to a livelier key than the one she had hitherto spoken in, "and what may be the unusual occurrence that has led to such an unusual result?"

"You speak more like your real self in that remark, Madeleine," replied Dubourg; "and though it is less flattering to me, it gives me a better assurance of your sincerity. But, as a pleasant prelude to the colloquy I propose, walk to the window, and give me your opinion of the equipage I have provided for your morning drive."

His companion hastened to the window, and gave a suppressed cry of pleasure. "Beautiful!" she exclaimed. "Sapristi!"—forgetting at once, in the joy of the surprise, that, by a vulgar expression, nearest to an oath, she was forfeiting every claim to the sentimental lady she had feigned. "They are undeniably and perfectly beautiful. Chariot, liveries, horses, everything in keeping, and splendid in style!"

"As to the chariot and the liveries," said Dubourg, "you may have some just ideas with regard to them, but no woman has any idea of a horse farther than his head and tail, and the tail of a horse is as often tied on here for a drive, as the wig of an old beau is put on for the same purpose, without wiser heads than yours making any discovery of the trick. But I rejoice that the equipage meets your approbation, since I came this morning to offer it to your acceptance."

"That is kind indeed," replied Madeleine, though evidently expressing less delight at the acquisition than the

donor had expected; "but, for a favour so unusual, something will probably have to be paid. What sacrifice am I to make for this elegant addition to my pleasures?"

Dubourg hesitated for a moment, and then replied: "If I ask sacrifices, I am willing to make them, as you perceive from the gift I have just offered you. There are others that I will make, if you will oblige me in the object I have in view. I saw on your table yesterday a handful of bills, of which those of Victorine and Herbault alone are sufficient to send you to Clichy, unless a hand more powerful than your own is interposed to prevent such a catastrophe."

"And by what right do you take upon yourself to examine my bills without my knowledge or consent?" said Madeleine, reddening with anger, and altogether forgetting her assumed softness of manner.

Dubourg smiled scornfully. "You can answer that question as well as I can," he replied. "But, as I have said to you, I have no time at present to waste in idle words. The equipage I offer is yours, to do what you will with. This house is leased for you for a term of three years. The bills I saw yesterday, to the extent of more thousands than all your possessions are worth, shall be instantly paid, provided——"

"Ah, that proviso!" exclaimed Madeleine, "it must indeed involve a serious matter. Well, proceed."

"Before I explain farther," said Dubourg, "let me reverse the picture. If you refuse to grant the request I am about to make, the equipage vanishes as suddenly as ever did that of the Cenerentola, and you will find nought but rats in the place of the horses you so ardently admire. Your creditors will come on you in a swarm, before the week is ended. Your house will be stripped of its furniture to satisfy their claims; your jewels, furs, and laces will follow; the house itself will be underlet; and the fair personage I have now the honour to address will be plunged once more into the wretchedness and obscurity from which she has once been rescued."

"You offer a frightful alternative," said his companion, covering her face with her hands, and shuddering with an expression of genuine feeling; "name your terms—I shall be obedient."

"Those words are the first really sensible ones you have spoken this morning," said Dubourg. "Listen to me, for my explanation requires attention. It is all a farce, Madeleine, for you to pretend such devoted attachment to me. I know that you are bound to me more by interest than affec-

tion, and it is to that interest alone that I appeal. All the promises I have made I will fully guarantee to you ; and, what will be better for you, if the plan in which I am about to ask your co-operation succeeds, I will engage to settle on you a handsome pension for life.

"There is in this metropolis," he continued, "a young person of noble extraction. Her father and his nephew——"

"A father and a nephew !" interrupted Madeleine. "The first part of your communication, if it is what I suspect, was promising for the scheme ; the latter seems to contradict the possibility of carrying it into execution."

"Listen to my explanation without interrupting me," said Dubourg, impatiently. "The father is an Italian nobleman of high rank and great wealth, but entirely absorbed in pursuits that occupy all his time, to the exclusion of attention to affairs of practical interest, and he is thus rendered an easy prey to subtle minds——"

"Like yours, for example," said Madeleine.

"He has been easily duped in many things of vital interest to him," continued Dubourg, without heeding the interruption, "and with your aid I can secure his whole fortune, of which, as I have said, you shall be a partaker."

"And how is this honourable purpose to be effected ?" inquired Madeleine.

"Simply by securing the hand of his only daughter for myself," said Dubourg ; "and this is the point upon which I have now come to make my compact with you."

"And, supposing that your brilliant scheme should fail," said Madeleine, "what would remain for you but the galleys, and for me imprisonment, perhaps for life, even if I should not run the risk of the cunning little window that might be shut down so neatly on my head ?" and she touched the back of her neck expressively in imitation of the action of the guillotine.

"Pshaw !" ejaculated Dubourg. "Heads do not fall so lightly for offences against rank and power as they did in former days ; people have grown wiser."

"They have grown too wise, I fear me, for such a mad project as yours to succeed, Auguste," said his companion ; "but explain your plan farther, and I can then decide on its feasibility."

"My success will depend mainly upon your cunning and presence of mind," said Dubourg ; "my plan is this. I shall expect you every day this week to take a drive at this hour in the Bois de Boulogne. I shall there find an early oppor-

tunity of pointing out to you the chariot in which the young lady may be seen every fair morning, taking the air with her father. Should any accidental occurrence present you the opportunity, you will promptly and cleverly avail yourself of it to offer yourself and your carriage to take the young person to her father's house in the Faubourg St. Germain, alleging as a reason why you offer this civility, that your *hôtel*—mind the important and distinguishing word—is in that quarter, and near her own.

"If she falls into the trap, and consents to take a seat in your elegant vehicle, take care to make some pretext for drawing down the curtains. At the distance of a league from the city, you will find post-horses ready to take the place of yours. Your elegant chariot must for once serve the purpose of a travelling carriage. You must continue on with all the speed that gold can buy to Sens. There pause, and I will overtake you, for I shall be compelled to remain here perhaps the whole day, to throw dust into the eyes of the bereaved father and the frantic nephew, and to put both upon a wrong scent by my sympathy and my researches for the lost treasure."

"But if the wit of the young lady should surpass mine?" inquired Madeleine. "I may be caught in the trap you have so ingeniously prepared."

"The daughter of the nobleman is very young," said Dubourg, "and most probably very ignorant, as she has been entirely secluded from society. She can be more easily duped than the father. I can act the tender lover to perfection, and you can as easily perform the part of the amiable protectress. I do not at all despair of cajoling her into a passion for me; and when her union with me is indissoluble, her father's forgiveness will be secured, and his fortune will be our reward. Remember that I count upon your aid. You are clever, wary, and unscrupulous. Exercise your talent, and it will be bountifully repaid. 'Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it,' as you can when it suits your purpose. Are you willing to bind yourself to this compact?"

Madeleine hesitated. At length she replied, "Of what use would it be to refuse? you have me in your power,—do with me as you will,—yes, I consent."

"Then adieu for the present, *ma chère*," said Dubourg. "The chariot of madame awaits her!"

He said the last words in a loud tone, and the obsequious footman stood, hat in hand, to receive her orders.

"Au Bois de Boulogne!" said the mistress of the elegant vehicle, as she threw herself on the luxurious cushions.

Dubourg waived the ceremony of assisting the fair owner to mount the steps, and waited a few moments (apparently unwilling to be recognised in her presence) until she was out of sight. He then walked rapidly to the Champs Elysées, and emerged from the side-street at the moment that a curicle was dashing past it. With the easy familiarity of old acquaintance and friendship, he made a signal to the servants to stop, and sprang into it.

"You are early in your drive this morning, Victor," he said, as he seated himself by his friend, who willingly made room for him by his side; "but the season is tempting after the freezing cold and the darkness of the past winter. It is pleasant to bask in such a sun as this," he continued, carelessly stretching his lazy length, as if to receive the full benefit of the warmth he eulogized.

"I have a headache this morning," replied Victor; "we were up too late last night, and I begin to feel the effects of such continual excitement on my nerves. I came out earlier than usual to-day, in the hope that the air would dispel it."

"Your remedy is too gentle," said Dubourg. "I can recommend one that will be far more efficacious. Why do you never ride, instead of driving? The exercise is more stimulating, and would soon re-establish your health, which, I see with deep regret, has of late been declining."

The last words were uttered in a cadence of fraternal solicitude, and with an expression of tender sympathy.

"I have never practised horsemanship sufficiently to make it a pleasure to me," said Victor, "and though I have taken lessons for a year at a time, I find that I began the exercise too late in life. To make a perfect cavalier, one should begin almost in infancy, and continue the exercise constantly as an every-day habit, and not as a mere accomplishment."

"This is true, I grant you," replied Dubourg, "if you desire to be distinguished in a steeple-chase, or if you should chance to visit our neighbours on the other side of the Channel, and would there always be in at the death of the fox; but a more sober, sentimental ride would better accord with your nerves and your health, and you would find the accomplishment you have acquired to serve you as well for such a purpose, as the habit you might have possessed."

"I find that a horse perfectly trained gives me agreeable exercise and excitement," said Victor; "but such are rare

here, and grooms are so faithless that I have always found the trouble they give surpasses the pleasure which the horses they profess to attend can afford me."

"Your friends," replied Dubourg, "cannot allow your health, which is of so much more importance than their own in the present posture of affairs, to be put to hazard, while there are means at hand that might effect its restoration. I am most happy, my dear friend, that I have it in my power to give you the pleasure without the penalty that attaches to it, and you will find, for once, the *nul plaisir sans peine* a fallacy. I have an admirable English hunter, a new acquisition, and he will be perfectly at your service every fine morning when you will do me the favour to use him. You will find him perfectly trained, docile and gentle, yet with mettle enough, when you put him up to it, to give you exercise and occupation. You can guide him with a silken thread——"

"Your enthusiasm will lead you into some extravagance, if I do not interrupt it," said Victor, attempting a smile, that played over his pale face like a wintry sunbeam, appearing only for an instant, and then vanishing in the gloom. "You can send your horses to-morrow, if it suits your convenience. If I feel well enough, I may avail myself of your kindness."

"I trust you may," returned Dubourg; "but we must not speak of illness, for the surest way to invite the monster's approach is running to meet him, unlike other monsters, who are always appalled by being looked steadfastly in the face. Let us speak of something more pleasant. *Apropos*, why have you never fulfilled your promise of presenting me to your fair cousin and her father?"

The theme his friend had selected to divert sad thoughts, seemed ill imagined for the purpose. The pale cheek grew paler, as Victor replied with an effort at self-command, and with assumed carelessness, "Oh, the time is not yet come. I shall fulfil my promise at a future day, but at present there are circumstances that induce the comte to live more in retirement than usual. When these circumstances no longer present an obstacle, his daughter will appear in the fashionable world."

"And, meantime, what is so handsome a cavalier as yourself thinking of, Victor, not to take advantage of your privileges of acquaintance, to make an impression on the fair one? Ah! the reason is plain. Doubtless she is old and ugly, and you do not think it would be worth the trouble to obtain a

dispensation from Rome, which would be necessary in your union with so near a relative, and thus enable you to possess yourself of the treasure. But I perceive that it gives you pain to converse. Trust me, the remedy I propose will be a sovereign cure. You may drop me here," he continued, "for I prefer walking to driving in such a pleasant day as this. I shall inquire after your health this evening. Adieu! my friend."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ACCIDENT.

AT the hour appointed on the following day, the horses promised by his kind and considerate friend were at Victor's door.

As he descended to the court, he found the English groom, a specimen of the most approved proportions of diminutiveness for the fashionable *tiger*, arrayed in his neat tightly-fitting costume, buttoned *redingote*, belted waist, buckskins, and white-topped boots, walking the fine hunter to and fro, to curb his impatience until the happy moment should arrive to free him from the scorned restraint.

Victor, as he had explained to his friend, was a fashionable, though not a practised horseman. He vaulted lightly into the saddle, as this was a part of the exercise he had attained in perfection, and found that the fine animal well merited the praise enthusiastically lavished on him by his owner. He submitted to every caprice of the rider with perfect docility, and the silken thread which Dubourg had vaunted as sufficient to control him would, as it seemed to Victor, have well served the purpose.

Exhilarated and refreshed by the unusual exercise and excitement, he was returning from an hour's ride through the *allées* of the Bois de Boulogne, when he was overtaken by Dubourg. Victor checked his horse, and they rode slowly side by side.

"You find my prescription salutary, I trust," said Dubourg. "I can assure you I am no mean physician, especially when the health of a friend so dear to me is at stake. You look like yourself this morning; quite different from my nervous patient of yesterday."

"Yes," replied Victor, gratefully passing his hand over the neck of the fine animal he rode, who acknowledged the caress by proudly raising his head, as if conscious of the

praises bestowed on him, "your horse has produced results already that the whole pharmacopœia of the apothecary's treasures could not have effected. But he is better used to the spirited exercise I have given him this morning than I am. I must return home to repose after it."

As he spoke, they entered a narrow *allée*, the width of which admitted of the passage of only one carriage at a time. It was already occupied by a chariot, which Victor recognised as that of his kinsman, the Comte de Visconti. To his surprise, instead of drawing up on one side, as Victor was passing on the other, Dubourg, with an apparent awkwardness unpardonable in a skilful horseman, persisted in keeping his place by the side of his friend. His armed heel came in rough contact with the side of the spirited hunter. The horse reared and plunged, shied suddenly, and Victor was thrown with violence to the ground.

The count hastily descended from his carriage, and approached the spot where his nephew was lying, stunned and nearly insensible, but happily without farther injury. Dubourg was supporting Victor's head on his shoulder, and lamenting the sad accident in terms such as only the tenderest friendship could suggest. Beatrice, faint with terror, came trembling to the spot where the accident, which she feared was fatal, had happened.

At this moment a chariot drove up, and a lady elegantly dressed descended from it, and, with expressions of kindly sympathy, softly inquired if she could afford any assistance.

"I perceive," she said, "that the young lady is very much agitated. I think I have the honour to address myself to the Comte de Visconti. My hotel in the Faubourg St. Germain is very near your own, and as there is only room in your chariot for yourself and the young gentleman who has met with the accident (your son, I presume), if it is agreeable to her, I shall be most happy to offer the young lady a seat in mine, and conduct her to your residence."

The count, who was too much agitated and perplexed by the alarming accident that had just occurred to perceive anything not perfectly natural and suitable in this kind proposal, so gracefully and delicately made, accepted the offer, and, with the assistance of Dubourg, placed his nephew in his chariot, and took his seat by his side. Beatrice put herself under the protection of the gentle-looking lady, who, with many soothing expressions of tenderness and condolence, followed her into the elegant vehicle that awaited her orders.

"You have been weeping, signorina," she said. "Your eyes are still full of tears, and your nerves are sadly shaken. Ah, the brother who can claim such tears from those eyes must be dear indeed! Allow me to exclude that glaring sunlight."

She drew down the silken blinds of the chariot as she spoke.

Beatrice was too much agitated to observe anything strange in the proposition. She was relieved, by the exclusion of the light, from the pain the sun really caused, and she became absorbed in a deep reverie, which made her unconscious that more than twice the time necessary to reach her father's residence had elapsed. She was aroused from her meditations by a pause in the motion of the carriage, which had been driven with fearful velocity, though she had not perceived it.

Supposing that she had arrived at home, she was about to thank her amiable protectress for her kindness, when, to her astonishment, she saw the domestic aiding a postilion to attach post-horses to the vehicle that contained herself and her companion. The metropolis was far behind her, and only a house for the relay was in sight. The broad, straight road, with its long double lines of dusty trees, was the only other visible object.

"Oh Heaven!" exclaimed Beatrice, clasping her hands and gazing with wild terror around her, "what is the meaning of all this? I entreat you, madam, to take me instantly to my father, as you promised."

"My dear love," said the lady, in her tenderest tones, "be composed, I implore you. I am only acting according to the directions I have received."

"Directions? it is impossible!" said Beatrice. "My father never sent me from him thus. This is some vile deception!" she cried, and, with a wild shriek, she attempted to wrest her hand from that of her companion, who forcibly detained her by holding both hers.

"Poor thing!" said the servant who was assisting the postilions in attaching the horses, "you perceive that she has lost her wits. This good lady is her aunt, and she is only taking her to an insane asylum in the country. So she informed us this morning. We shall have to watch her closely, to prevent her escaping, or doing some violence to herself or others."

The postilions, after this explanation, completed their work without farther inquiry, and in another moment the

chariot was again whirled forward, and was rapidly measuring league after league of the long, straight, dusty road,—the cat-like companion of the hapless Beatrice remaining as insensible to her frantic cries as the animal she so much resembled is to the fluttering struggles of the poor bird secured within her merciless claws.

As the vehicle continued its rapid career, it overtook another vehicle, wheeling with almost equal rapidity along the straight, dusty road; but this one was furnished with only three post-horses, while that which bore the feline monster and her prey had the advantage of four.

The plain but substantial and appropriate travelling chariot was distanced, and its solitary occupant was left to meditate upon the peculiarities which, as an observing traveller, he had remarked in the vehicle that had dashed by him with such unusual speed.

He had remarked, even in that brief moment, that the vehicle was of the most elegant make and finish, far more suitable for display than for the rough usage to which it was dedicated,—that it was in singular and striking contrast with the four stout *percheron* post-horses, with their coarse plaited manes and clubbed-up tails, and that the glittering panels and silken curtains accorded ill with a harness of ropes. The gala liveries of the domestics were in equally striking contrast with the grotesque costume of the postilions, who, with their high, broad-brimmed leather hats, huge boots reaching nearly to the hips, and jackets garnished with never-ending rows of small bullet buttons, were cracking their resounding whips in unison, and drowning, for the moment, the ceaseless jingle of the rows of bells passed around the clumsy necks of the horses.

The cracking of these whips grew louder, and still more like the report of so many pistols, as the postilions arrived at the relay where a change of horses was to be effected.

The travelling carriage arrived just as the elegant one that had preceded it was again in motion. The solitary traveller was certain that he heard a shriek of distress from some one within it.

"Who were those persons in the carriage that drove off just now?" he inquired of the *maître de poste*, who was standing with his hands in his pockets, looking curiously after the handsome vehicle.

"*Bon Dieu!*" ejaculated the man, "as if I could know all the people who came here for post-horses!"

"You can, at least, inform me how many there are, sir."

of what description," said the traveller. "You may add another horse," he continued, seeing the postilion coming with three which he had some suspicions, from their appearance, had been used too recently for effective service, "I desire to have four, and of the best. I shall give you an additional fee, if they are strong and fresh!"

"Oh, I can answer your question now more easily," said the obsequious man of the post with newly-awakened civility. "The carriage about which you seem interested contained two persons. They were both ladies. The younger of the two seemed in great distress, and cried aloud for help, saying that she had been stolen from her father, and carried off by a strange woman. But the other lady and the servants all said that the poor thing had lost her wits, and that her aunt was only doing her duty in taking her into the country to a great doctor who has a *maison de santé* full of such patients under his charge. Four horses, did you say?"

"Yes," said the traveller, "and those of the freshest and best. Here is a louis for yourself. See well to it, I shall be obliged."

"Certainly, milord," said the man, bustling about with activity to execute an order so pleasantly accompanied, and supposing, as his practised eye had recognised a foreigner, that none but an English *milord* would offer such a fee, or require such luxurious accommodation; "the horses will be ready in a moment."

And with an alacrity that showed his inclination as well as his power, he hastened to the stables, and soon reappeared with two postilions and four of the *percherons*, as rough as those that had just been taken from his carriage, but stout, fresh, and apparently ready and willing for the journey.

To deal no longer in mystery, it may be as well to explain at once what the reader has probably already suspected, that the *milord* of the *maître de poste* was Reginald Villiers, who, as the P. P. C. on the card he had left in a fit of jealous pique indicated, had resolved to leave a place where his hopes of promise had been so suddenly checked, and, he feared, blighted by "a frost, a killing frost."

He had written to a friend he had left in Italy, who intended passing the winter in Rome, and the spring in Florence and Genoa, to inform him that he would join him in one of the last-named cities. This was the first day of the journey so rashly undertaken and already repented of; but he realized the truth of the often-repeated saying,

"c'est le premier pas qui coûte," and this first step made the rest of the plan irrevocable.

He dared not trust himself to think on a subject that gave him so much pain as did the cause of his sudden determination; and the appearance of the chariot which had passed him on the road gave him something of interest, which he resolved should occupy his thoughts and attention, to the exclusion of those that tormented him.

A moderate stimulus, in the form of a *pour boire*, enabled Reginald to arrive in sight of the other carriage in less than an hour. He directed the postilions to keep it in sight until the termination of the day's journey, which was now near at hand, as the sun was setting. The two carriages arrived nearly at the same moment at Sens, and entered at the same time into the court of the same hotel.

As Reginald descended from his own, he heard a female voice, in angry tones of expostulation, within the other carriage.

"Sapristi!" she exclaimed, "it is useless now to refuse to get out here: what good will remaining in the carriage do you? The people cannot wait for you all night!"

"Take me back to my father, cruel woman!" replied a voice faint with emotion. "Why have I been torn from his arms? Oh, my God! will no one have pity on me?"

The voice died away as she spoke, and the young person who uttered this sad lamentation had apparently become insensible, for her companion called loudly for assistance, and she was lifted from the carriage and taken into the house by her attendants.

"Poor thing!" ejaculated her companion, and addressing herself to the landlord and his fat, good-natured wife, who bustled around the fainting lady with restoratives. "She will come to herself presently; she has had several of these fits already to-day. My poor niece is entirely insane. She has had a brain fever that has ended in this manner, and having tried the skill of the best physicians of the capital in vain, I am taking her to a celebrated maison de santé near Geneva."

At this moment the young lady partially revived. "Oh, my father!" she exclaimed; "is your poor Beatrice, then, to be the victim of an infamous deception? Is the noble name of Visconti to be known only as a reproach? Have pity on me!" she cried, extending her arms wildly to those who were standing near her; "I have been stolen from my father by this woman. Oh, take me back to him, and your reward will be ample!"

"She raves, as you hear," said her companion, mildly. "Annette, my dear child," she continued, addressing herself to the supposed lunatic, "you cannot remain here. These good people must take you to your chamber. The malady increases hourly," she added, addressing herself to the bystanders. "What a sad thing it is to see a young person entirely bereft of reason! The daughter of a rich cheesemonger, as she is, to fancy herself little less than a princess!"

"Poor lamb!" said the compassionate hostess; "and pretty enough she is for a princess, too; but, as you say, she ought not to stay here."

The unfortunate girl had relapsed into a state almost of insensibility, and made no farther resistance to being taken to her chamber. But the words she had uttered, though sounding like "idle tales" to the obtuse understanding of the fat landlady and her Boniface husband, as well as the gaping crowd of peasant domestics that surrounded her, had been better understood and appreciated by Reginald, who had listened to them with deep attention.

He felt convinced, however, that, if his suspicions were just, it would require silence and caution, as well as energy, to defeat a plot which so far seemed to have been managed with such consummate skill, that any imprudent action on his part might lead to a futile result.

Reginald had never seen the Signorina Visconti, but he had often heard Constance speak of her; for, though they had not been associated in the gayer scenes of the metropolis, the count had not hesitated to avail himself of the suggestions of Madame Laval to present her pupils to each other, and Constance and Beatrice often met, and a friendship was already formed between them.

The appearance of the beautiful girl, who had just been taken away in a state almost exanimate, confirmed his suspicions. It was not probable that a lunatic, even if she fancied herself the daughter of a nobleman instead of a rich cheesemonger, as her companion affirmed, would have fallen on the name of Visconti as the favoured one of her selection; and the longer Reginald pondered over this singular coincidence, the more firmly was he convinced that the signorina was indeed the heroine of this strange adventure.

A few minutes of rapid and concentrated thought determined him on the best course to pursue. He sent to request the presence of the landlord. Boniface came as quickly as his corpulency would allow him to waddle up stairs.

"Where is the maître de poste?" inquired Reginald,

"I have the honour to claim that title myself," replied the landlord, bowing. "Or at least I have all the post-horses here at my disposal, which is the same thing."

"Has the lady just arrived given any orders?" said Reginald.

"Yes," replied Boniface, still panting with the exertion of mounting the stairs. "She has ordered four horses to be kept in readiness for a start at a moment's warning; they will perhaps be wanted at midnight."

"And what does she pay for them?"

Boniface named the sum.

"Those horses I must have," said Reginald. "I will pay you double the price the lady offers for them. And how many others are at your disposal?"

"Mon Dieu! there are only four more to be had to-night in the whole place; to-morrow we shall be better supplied."

"Then, remember, if there are a dozen," said Reginald, "they are mine. I must have them without reserve. Make any excuse you please, but the horses I must have."

"What! all of them, milord?"

"Yes—all."

"Very well, milord. Now that I think of it, two of those I promised the lady are lame." He said this with a knowing wag of the head, and winked several times with one eye, though without giving any farther indication of the implied roguery.

"Now," said Reginald, "I must consult you on another point. I have need of a swift and trusty messenger to go for me to Paris on a matter of vital consequence. Is there any one here that I could intrust with such a commission? If the messenger will return to Paris as rapidly as the estafette, he shall be rewarded with fifty louis-d'or."

"Parbleu! milord," exclaimed Boniface, "this is an offer worth accepting. My son Jacques will be too happy to do your errand. There is not a lad like him for riding and running in all the land. He has been bred with the horses; it will be nothing but fun for him."

Jacques was speedily summoned. He was a handsome, athletic fellow, with an honest, intelligent face. Reginald felt that he might intrust him with his delicate commission.

"Have you been in Paris?" he said to the young man.

"Often, milord. I am well acquainted with the outside of the city, though I have never lived there. But my calling has made me acquainted with the different quarters and streets."

"Then," said Reginald, handing him a letter which he had hastily penned in the intervals of his colloquy with the father and son, "you probably know where to find this address."

"Certainly, milord; it is one of the finest streets in the city. I know it well."

"Hasten, then," said Reginald. "Lose not a moment; and deliver this letter into the hands of the Comte de Visconti himself. You will readily gain access to him if you tell the porter that you bring him news of his daughter."

The young man took the letter, and, bestowing it carefully in a small portfolio, which he buttoned within the breast of his coat, bowed and withdrew.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RESULT OF THE PLOT.

THE excitement of his rapid journey, and the adventure that had given it interest, indisposed Reginald for sleep.

His couch was inviting, for the humblest *auberge* in the *grande nation* boasts, and not without reason, of its comfortable beds, made, as they invariably are, on the same comfortable pattern,—the same piles of light mattresses and large square pillows, with the ample sheets of clean though coarse linen, covering and double-covering the couch.

The usual mal-assortment of finery and dust distinguished the small suite of rooms placed at his disposal. In the most important of these, the gay curtains of muslin, with silken draperies, swept a floor inlaid with varnished hexagonal bricks; and porcelain vases, painted in gaudy colours and crowned with faded artificial flowers, flaunted on either side of a small gilded clock on the mantel. The mirror, that pride of the *auberge*, in a gilded frame rather the worse for wear, reflected these and other treasures, and gave doubly to view the small and dust-covered lustre with its glass drops, that indicated the best apartment of the hotel.

A dusty table was hastily wiped down to receive the clean linen cloth and napkin, and to accommodate a tray which was brought up with the *petit souper* strongly recommended by Boniface to *milord*. The well-roasted *poulet*, the small white loaf, the delicate cream and butter, and the *café au lait*, all the best of their kind, bore testimony to the *gastronomic taste* of the fat host and hostess, and at once

explained the phenomenon of two such specimens of obesity, rarely seen in the same family.

Reginald partook lightly of mine host's delicacies, and determined that he would sit up at least until midnight, the hour he had been informed that the travellers, who had arrived with him the preceding evening, had indicated as the probable one for the continuation of their journey. The precautions he had taken to deprive them of the means of travelling he relied upon with confidence, but he knew not what other resources might be supplied by accomplices, who were, doubtless, at hand to complete the success of a plot contrived so far with singular ingenuity.

His first important step taken, Reginald paused to consider the course he should next pursue in unravelling the dark mystery, which a ray of light had thus penetrated. If his surmise should not be realized, he might involve himself in serious difficulties by meddling in a matter of no ostensible concernment to him, and he had no proof to sustain the allegation he desired to make against the person calling herself the aunt and protectress of the young lady under her charge.

But the hour was now too late to proceed farther in the plan he had revolved in his mind, and when midnight came, feeling assured, from the quiet that reigned in the house, that there was no attempt to remove the unhappy prisoner, he retired to rest.

At an hour very unusual for a young milord, who might have been excused for some indulgence after the rapid journey of the preceding day, Reginald summoned a servant, and requested to see the landlord. Boniface, now all smiles and obedience, hastened to obey the summons, mounted the stairs, and trundled his corpulency into the room.

"I have a matter of importance to confide to you," said Reginald, offering him a chair. "Sit down, I will confer with you about it."

The landlord modestly hesitated to take such a liberty in the presence of his noble customer; but Reginald persisted in placing him at his ease, that he might better command his attention.

"The young lady, and the person calling herself her aunt, who arrived at the same time that I did yesterday evening, are still here, I presume," said Reginald.

"Yes, milord," replied Boniface, "and my wife has had a bad night of it, for they kept her trotting about all night after one thing or other. I wish the wind that blew

here had driven them elsewhere, for I fear me they bode my house no good. The poor young lady is in a sad state. The aunt talks of going on her journey to-day, but my wife thinks she will not be able to travel."

"It is on this subject that I wish to converse with you," said Reginald, "and we have no time to lose. I have good reasons for believing that this young lady's account of herself is true, and that the one given by her companion is false. I believe that she is really, as she avers, the daughter of a nobleman, and that she has been stolen from her father by this woman."

"You have, then, seen these persons before?" inquired the landlord.

"No, I have never seen either of them before, and there lies my difficulty. I cannot declare positively that the woman or the young lady are either of them not what the former affirms, yet I tell you distinctly that I believe this young person to be the daughter of a wealthy nobleman, and that she has been, by some foul means, taken from her father's protection. With this suspicion, and with such testimony as I can bring, it will be dangerous for your house and yourself to allow them to depart without some farther examination into the circumstances the young lady alleges to be the truth."

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Boniface, wiping off some drops that had begun to form on his forehead, while Reginald made this avowal of his suspicions, and the consequences that might result from their confirmation, "why, this is a matter that might send some of us to the galleys, if we were mixed up in such a mess!"

"My advice, then," said Reginald, "is, that you absolve yourself as speedily as possible from all responsibility, by engaging a justice of the peace and some police officers to come quietly to the house, and to remain here during the morning. I will engage to determine the difficulty and to remove all doubts, as soon as your son returns, which he assured me would be about mid-day. Follow my directions without noise, and you will find, as I believe, that my impressions will be confirmed, and you will be relieved from serious embarrassment."

"Parbleu!" again ejaculated the landlord, and again wiping his forehead, "but it might be serious indeed! I will use all speed, milord, to obey your orders."

He trundled himself off; and in half an hour Reginald saw from his windows several men that, he knew from their

appearance, were officers of justice, crossing the court and entering the house.

The early hours of the morning passed away, and all remained quiet. Reginald, whose thoughts were alternately occupied with an anxiety to see a happy termination of the adventure, in which he had accidentally become one of the principal actors, and a wish to continue his journey, walked about the room with some impatience, looking from time to time at the *pendule* placed on the mantel, evidently for show rather than use, and then at his faithful chronometer.

The pendule struck twelve, the hour which, he expected, would bring his messenger. The chronometer contradicted the tiny ringing voice of the little clock. It had rung out the hour three quarters too soon.

At that moment the portal of the court opened, and a post-carriage drove rapidly in. Reginald saw a man descend hastily from it. He had only time to remark that this man was not the Comte de Visconti, to whose tall form and thoughtful face his attention had once been directed by Constance as the father of her young friend, the lovely Beatrice.

The man who had just entered the house was many years younger, and of a face and stature altogether different from his recollection of the count. Without knowing whether or not this person was concerned in the abduction of the young lady, Reginald thought it most probable that he was, and quitting his own apartment, he descended to the more public part of the house.

He there found the man who had just arrived, and the person who had professed herself the aunt and protectress of the young lady, both expostulating angrily with the landlord.

"By what right, sir," said this personage, whom the reader doubtless recognises as Dubourg,—“by what right do you dare to stop travellers on the highway in this unwarrantable manner? You shall pay dearly for this insolence! Where is the witness who has ventured upon such accusations against this lady, as well as myself?”

“Here,” answered Reginald coolly, as he walked forward. “I bring no accusations, and have simply related what I know to the landlord of this hotel. The young lady who arrived here last evening under the charge of the person with you, alleges that she is the daughter of the Comte de Visconti, an Italian nobleman now sojourning in Paris, and that she has been stolen from her father. I allege that

know there is a wealthy nobleman of that name in the metropolis, and that he has a young daughter. I have advised the Comte de Visconti of the circumstances that have fallen under my observation, in order that he may reclaim his daughter, if the young lady here is, as I suspect, that daughter."

"And in this manner," said Dubourg, turning haughtily from Reginald, and addressing himself to the officers of justice, "you are to allow me to be stopped on my journey, one of vital importance, by the interference of a stranger, and one who has nothing to do with my affairs."

"I require brief time," said Reginald, in a tone as haughty as the one Dubourg assumed, "to produce my proofs. If my messenger returns without satisfactory information, you will be at liberty to continue your journey, as I shall mine. I repeat that I have every reason to expect the Comte de Visconti here within an hour. If you choose to depart peaceably without the young lady, as I have no wish to signalize your disgrace, or to expose you to the well-merited indignation of the count, there is time left for your escape. I have no right to detain you, and I do not even know the nature of the plan in which you seem involved. If your tale is true, the loss of an hour of your time will be well compensated by freeing you from a terrible suspicion."

Dubourg's face turned livid with rage. He had been walking rapidly to and fro, like a chained tiger, between the landlord and the officers of justice. Approaching Reginald closely, he said, in a low voice that sounded like the hissing of a serpent through his clenched teeth, "you shall bitterly repent this interference,—I know you, and we shall meet again! Then—beware!"

He turned to the landlord with assumed composure.

"This is a strange piece of work," he said, "and a man who is so pragmatical as to meddle with the affairs of others without reason, deserves to be punished for it. You have all heard this young gentleman say that he is willing to assume the charge of a lunatic girl, the niece of my sister and myself, when we were about to place her under the direction of a distinguished physician, who might have restored her to health. We shall leave her to his charge, and that of the officers of justice, who have taken upon themselves to relieve us of our burthen. When you are all weary of it, we shall probably be called upon to reassume it. With regard to the aspersions that have been cast upon us, we shall seek redress *where it can be more effectually found.*"

With these words, and bestowing one more look of deadly hatred on Reginald, who returned it with one of calm defiance, Dubourg drew the arm of Madeleine in his own, and descending to the court, followed her into the post-carriage that stood awaiting his orders, and drove rapidly off.

Hardly had an hour elapsed after their departure, before the portals again opened, and another carriage drove with furious speed into the court.

Reginald recognised the tall form and noble bearing of the Comte de Visconti. His voice was heard on the stairway. In an instant the loved and lost one flew to his embrace. Oh, the agonizing rapture of that moment!

Reginald waited only to see the daughter clasped to her father's heart. When they turned to pour out their thanks to her young deliverer, he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LAST FAREWELL.

TIME and experience together have united to reveal to the inhabitants of the ancient capitals of Europe what their descendants, in the hemisphere more recently populated, have yet to learn, that air and space are as necessary to the existence of a city as they are to human life.

It is but poor economy to "build up and pull down," though there is doubtless "a time" for both. But this discriminative wisdom is certainly not found in the construction of interminable streets of ill-ventilated houses, built on speculation, and packing away multitudes of pale, sedentary inhabitants, whose only hope of escape from the prison, to which they are condemned for a year, is that of a month's reprieve, passed at some noisy, fashionable, uncomfortable watering-place.

Happy those who have means, even for this indulgence. There are thousands to whom such a luxury is denied; and they still drag on their wearied existence "in populous cities pent," advancing, by slow degrees, literally to "dusty death."

New cities begin by closing up every avenue to health and life, and end by purchasing, at the cost of millions, what, in their first creation, they might have secured for nothing,—the lungs indispensable to both. The capitals of the old

world have, doubtless, passed through this ordeal, and at the present day it is marvellous to see how much of the loveliness of nature may be found in the midst of those great cities.

The revolving year had again brought round the month of May, with its buds and blossoms, to revive the freshness of the gardens, the most pleasing feature of the metropolis of France. Those of the Faubourg St. Germain, united, rather than separated, by walls invisible to the eye, from their impervious covering of ivy, conveyed the impression of extensive grounds; and neighbouring houses were completely concealed from the view of each other by the leafy screens of trees, clothed with their tender verdure, that rose in soft masses between them.

For a distant promenade, the Luxembourg, the Jardin des Plantes, the never-failing resource of the Bois de Boulogne, and the Champs Elysées, vary the morning or evening drive. For a convenient walk, the garden of the Tuileries is always the favourite.

The peculiar taste of this garden, like that of Versailles, on which the Grand Monarque lavished so many millions, will always be a subject of criticism, but who will venture to affirm that both are not beautiful in the month of May? If they are angular, and pompous, and formal in design, yet even where the artist still shapes arches and colonnades out of the foliage, Nature in her redundant beauty effaces his work, breaking through all restraint, and giving freshness and shade and brightness and perfume wherever she finds her joyous home.

The gigantic marronniers of the Tuileries, if their trunks are planted with *quincunx* regularity, find freedom in their huge interlacing branches above, and in the foliage that forms an impervious shade beneath; the parterres of flowers, if they are laid off with geometrical precision, have, within their bounds, all the variety of colouring and form that nature can lend to art. The saucy little sparrows are as much at home among the elms trimmed into arches like a Gothic cathedral, as if they were in the grounds of a citizen's country-box,—the fishes frisk in their basins as merrily as the trout in a mountain stream, though their scales are golden, and their habitation is encircled with marble walls. The children of the artisan and the labourer trundle their hoops, and dance as gaily to the music of their nurses' songs, as those of the princes who watch their sports from the windows of the palace that overlook the scene.

"Comparisons," Mrs. Malaprop might truly have said, "are *odorous*" wherever nature can exercise her sweet influences; and art may regulate, but cannot destroy, her charms. A comparison between Versailles and a Swiss valley, or the Tuileries and an English park, would be as fruitless and unreasonable as to draw a parallel between the costume of a marquise of the court of Louis Quinze and that of the "Hours" of Guido; both depend for success on the natural beauties they adorn.

The return of spring had now restored nature to her dominion in the metropolis, and the pale votaries of dissipation gratefully exchanged the heated ball-room for *fêtes de jour*, which involved less fatigue and restraint. These assumed the favourite form of the *dejeuner*, though, in some instances, the breakfast was offered at six o'clock in the afternoon, and the guests remained until midnight, if they were disposed to partake of the dance that succeeded the breakfast, or to indulge in an evening ramble through an illuminated garden.

Of this description was one offered, during the season, by the hospitable and distinguished occupants of "the Embassy" in the rue St. Honoré, known throughout the metropolis by this apparently exclusive title, though one merited by its pre-eminence in seniority as well as style.

The sunlight had ceased to gild the trees around the *tapis vert* of velvet turf in the garden, and the guests were returning from their rambles toward the ball-room,—their gossamer dresses, and bright scarfs, and transparent hats, with light plumes fluttering, appearing and disappearing, among the trees and shrubbery, and giving added life and beauty to their natural charms.

A few coloured lamps glittered among the foliage, and served rather to ornament, than to illuminate, the walks of the garden, giving a mysterious light that heightened the illusion of the long imaginary distance to which they extended.

The lively music of the orchestra hastened the steps of the wanderers through these pleasing shades; and they disappeared by pairs into the domain of *Comus*. A few only, who seemed to find the fresh evening air more to their taste than the melting glories of the ball-room, still lingered, as if unwilling to exchange certain enjoyment for no less certain discomfort.

In these groups were several ladies, among them Mrs. Melville and Constance. Captain Delamere had joined the walking, instead of the dancing, party.

"Such a scene as this," he said to Constance, "is well suited to increase the regret I feel in abandoning the haunts of civilized men, and exchanging them for the jungles of India."

"But we have lions here, you perceive, to match the tigers in those jungles," said Constance, looking archly after a German duke who bowed as he passed them, and whose gorgeous dress was in keeping with his curled wig, rouged cheeks, and other imitations of youth long gone among other wasted and regretted things.

"The lions and tigers are, perhaps, the most interesting portion of the native population of my adopted land," said Captain Delamere; "and a hunt is one of the few enjoyments afforded to the dull monotony of our existence. But why should I dwell on a theme which can give me nothing but unmingled pain?"

"I can well imagine it," replied Constance, "by the feelings I should myself, doubtless, experience in such circumstances, though they are not liable to the tests yours are compelled to endure. Let us change the subject; there can surely be found a gayer one in so pleasant a place and company."

"And yet," said Captain Delamere, "I find it impossible to drive sad realities from my thoughts. This is the last day of my sojourn among my friends,—I leave them to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" said Constance, sorrowfully; "I thought you informed us that your stay would be prolonged some months. I can, indeed, well imagine that you should think of your departure even in the midst of this gay scene, and that you should be sad in the contemplation of so painful an event."

"In my departure, which I have received orders to hasten," said Captain Delamere, "I shall have at least one consolation,—that I shall not leave any heart behind me as heavy as my own. Sympathies are transient in this world,—I and my grief will soon be forgotten."

"Do not speak so mournfully," said Constance; "you have kind friends who will always remember you in spite of absence and distance."

Captain Delamere glanced at the lovely countenance of the speaker, as she fervently uttered these words; but its expression was the candid, ingenuous one of unsuspecting kindness and friendship; there was no embarrassment—*nothing that indicated a tenderer, stronger feeling.*

He sighed deeply as he replied, "Why should I repine at a lot to which so many of fairer promise than mine have been doomed? Miss Melville, shall I confess it?—there have been moments when I dared to hope that a stronger feeling than sympathy in my exile might be awakened in a heart that would have been to me more precious than all the treasures 'of Ormus and of Ind.' And even now, when I read that heart in its own ingenuous mirror, and find nothing there but friendship, I feel impelled to offer you a soldier's heart and hand, and life, and fortunes. Oh, that these wild hopes might be realized!"

He glanced again at the sweet face. It spoke the same language that had dashed those hopes; but a tear was stealing down her cheek.

"I trust," she said, "that I have not been guilty of adding yet another sorrow to that you feel in leaving your home and friends. Oh! Captain Delamere, do not, I entreat you, believe that I could have been so heartless as to—to—"

Her voice was extinguished by emotion.

"I know but too well what you would say," replied Captain Delamere. "Do not suppose for a moment that I blame you for what is only the consequence of your own attractive loveliness. In making this declaration I knew what the result would be; but I have yielded to the impulse of an irresistible feeling. When I am far away, think of me sometimes as one who will never forget you. I have a presentiment that we shall never meet again. Farewell!" he said, pressing her hands to his lips; "farewell—and—for ever!"

He advanced a few steps,—turned, looked at her once more, and was gone. He had spoken prophetic truth,—they never met again!

As the rest of the lingering party gradually entered the fine conservatory leading from the garden, and which was sufficiently lighted to give a pleasing effect to the varieties of tropical plants that adorned it, Mrs. Melville turned to Constance, who touched her arm at that moment. Constance was as pale as marble, and the hand that rested on her arm was cold and trembling with strong emotion.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, "you are ill,—what is the matter?"

"I feel faint and weary," replied Constance; "and if you please, my dear mother, I should like to return home as speedily as possible."

The moment was a favourable one for a retreat, for the noble hosts and their guests were equally engaged in resem-

ing the pleasures of the fête. They found no difficulty in accomplishing their exit, as their carriage was in waiting, and they were soon at home.

Alone with her dearest earthly friend, Constance threw herself into her mother's arms. That ever-sympathizing friend clasped her child to her heart.

"Sit down and compose yourself, my daughter," said Mrs. Melville, drawing Constance toward her, as she seated herself on a sofa, and laid the throbbing head of her daughter on her bosom. "Now tell me what is the cause of these tears that flow so freely," and she wiped them tenderly away.

"Dearest mother!" replied Constance, "my tears are partly caused by something like self-reproach. I fear that my pleasure in meeting Captain Delameré as a friend, that the unsuspecting kindness with which I have conversed with him, may have been misconstrued by him, though he was too generous to blame me. But, indeed, indeed I never dreamed, until this moment, that he entertained any deeper sentiment toward me than that of kindness and friendship. And oh, mother!—the sad idea that I, innocent as I feel myself of such a design, should have added one more pang to that noble heart, when he was leaving home, and country, and friends, to be, as he says, a desolate exile, and that we shall never see him more!" and she wept without restraint.

"My child," said her mother, "your sympathy is natural, and I honour the sentiments you express. But I have always been a witness of your conduct, and I can console you by the assurance that there has been nothing in it for you to blame. Captain Delamere, in this respect, accorded you only what justice demanded. If kindness on our part led to an error on his, I have been more to blame than you have in the attentions we have shown him. But I am satisfied that he could not have intended to reproach you."

"On the contrary, he exonerated me from the reproach I was disposed to take on myself," said Constance. "But I feel very, very sad. And then, dearest mother, what can be the meaning of Reginald's sudden departure? Gone without a word of explanation,—oh, mother! do you know, I thought Reginald loved—liked me—I mean, too well to act in so strange a manner. What do you suppose is the cause of it all?"

"*There is some mystery in Reginald's conduct that I am at a loss to comprehend,*" said Mrs. Melville, "though long

acquaintance with the world has given me some insight into the human heart. The most obvious cause, I believe, may be found in connexion with Captain Delamere's attentions to you, for Reginald was certainly not himself the last time we saw him, which, as you remember, was at the Louvre the day we first met Captain Delamere. But I have a presentiment that this riddle, whatever it may be, will sooner or later be read. Reginald, even if he thinks he has cause to feel aggrieved, which it seems he has not, will return as surely as a moth returns to the light that he has been fluttering around, until the tips of his wings are not only singed, but blazing in a little flame kindled by that same light.

"Good night, dearest," she added, kissing the fair brow and cheek. "Try to sleep off these first griefs. The clouds that have cast their sombre shadows over your path this evening will soon be dispelled. When 'fair morning' returns in her 'amice grey,' she will restore the joyous light, and point with her 'radiant finger' to brighter and happier hours than these."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROYAL DISGUISES.

THE arrival in the métropolis of the king and queen of Naples, the parents of the Duchesse de Berri, mother of the heir of the throne, the young Henri V., restored the gaiety that had begun to languish under the enervating influences of spring. The charms of reviving nature and vernal airs, though in striking contrast with the artificial glories and heated atmosphere of crowded assemblies, were not sufficiently attractive to supersede them, especially when so plausible an excuse for renewing their favourite amusements was offered to the gay world.

In order to dispense as far as possible with the courtly ceremonials which, the regal guests probably knew from experience, would, at such a season, confer as little real enjoyment on the receivers of these splendid courtesies as on the givers, they assumed fictitious names. The Count and Countess of Castellamare, as their majesties chose to style themselves, were with these comparatively simple titles to be presented to the courtly circles.

But this self-denying modesty was unavailing. The polite-

ness of the reigning sovereign was not to be so easily baffled, and the Neapolitan king and queen were so easily recognized beneath their unpretending titles as to recall the trite comparison of the ostrich when her head is buried in the sand, vainly hoping that the hunter will not discover her because she cannot see him.

It would indeed have required but little skill to conceal his Majesty, as a very small, a very old, and a very insignificant looking man, as he was, might have passed in any crowd for something less than the Count of Castellamare. His regal consort it would have been more difficult to disguise, or to pass off for any one but herself to those who had ever beheld or even heard of her. With such as were acquainted with her appearance, it would have been hardly possible to realize anything either of majesty or nobility in a huge misshapen mass of humanity that had lost, in her excessive obesity, not only every trace of comeliness, if she had ever possessed any, but almost all semblance of a being with a soul. But these disadvantages availed as little to seclude the royal pair, as did the modest names assumed for the occasion of their visit.

The Count and Countess of Castellamare, inhabiting the small but elegant palace of the Elysée Bourbon, received circle after circle of the élite, in accordance with the wishes of the sovereign who claimed them as his guests; and this ceremony completed, the gaieties of the court were resumed with unusual magnificence.

The *jeu du Roi*, which united all that was brilliant in the circle of the palace, was the introductory one of these fêtes. The king's card party, though it boasted of small attractions in natural charms, or in youth and beauty, brought together gold embroidery and diamonds enough to illuminate the gorgeous Salle des Marechaux and the Galerie de Diane of the Tuileries, even without the aid of the lustres that threw floods of light over the brilliant scene.

The King of Naples, coughing and hobbling around the circles of *trained* and courtly ladies, merited, as he received, their thanks for the exertions he made, with such visible inconvenience, to do honour to the attentions he received. His illustrious consort waddling around, with a strange smile upon her broad unmeaning face, panted and puffed beneath the weight of the richly jewelled diadem, as if it had been a crown of thorns.

There again sat the daughter of the unfortunate Louis XVI. Thoughtful and abstracted she sat, revolving dark

memories of the terrible past—foreshadowing dreamy visions of the bitter future—silent, solemn, and sad.

To this courtly fête succeeded, after an interval of a few days, representations at the theatre of the Tuileries, where the gorgeous attire of the spectators formed in itself a *spectacle* independently of the stage. There sylphide Taglioni, in all her youthful pride, balanced her airy form like a butterfly on a rose-leaf, or flew with visible or invisible wings amid clouds, where “the moon walking in brightness” looked like her own silvery majesty.

These festivals, and such as these, occupied the gay evenings in rapid succession during the visit of the Count and Countess of Castellamare, until the final *bouquet*—the title accorded to the magnificent fête of the Duke of Orleans at his residence, the Palais Royal—closed the dazzling procession.

Art had been exhausted in preparations for this fête, which was intended to surpass all that had preceded it. Nature lent her aid, for the long gallery, which surrounded the whole garden, had been itself converted into a garden, and was filled with exotic plants, among which festoons of lamps of gorgeous hues glowed with prismatic beauty. The palace within and without, the galleries and the garden, were blazing with light; the orchestras, placed at sufficient intervals not to disturb the harmony of each other, invited the dancers to their gay sport, and the rich perfume of the orange-blossoms, wafted in at the open windows and doors, completed the fascination of every sense.

The company equalled in brilliancy the preparations so lavishly made for their reception and entertainment, and surpassed that of the fêtes which had preceded it greatly in numbers, as no exclusion of the young and lovely had been made in the invitations that had been distributed with an unsparing hand.

It was this occasion that the Comte de Visconti had selected, as the one which would be most pleasing, to present his fair daughter to the fashionable world. The exposure of the infamous plot, which had so nearly robbed him of his dearest treasure, had exercised a salutary influence over his fortunes. Dubourg, whose cunning had been sufficient to conceal the nefarious scheme from Victor and his kinsman, had not escaped, however, without strong suspicions on their part, which completely withdrew their friendship and countenance from him, though the testimony against him was not sufficient to consign him to the disgrace and punishment he so justly merited.

But he was disarmed by these suspicions of the power of farther mischief against Beatrice, and the mysterious influences, which had darkened the fortunes of her father, were dispelled by the discovery of his treachery. The count was at length convinced that the safety of his child would have been better assured if she had been more accustomed to act for herself, and had been surrounded with less restraint. He resolved in future to pursue a different plan from the one he had adopted in secluding her from the world, and that he would permit her to judge of it more for herself, when she could do so under favourable auspices.

The count willingly yielded to the persuasions of his daughter to accompany her young friend Constance on this interesting occasion, and Mrs. Melville was happy to assume the charge of both.

A lovelier pair was never seen than these two when, arrayed in their favourite robes of transparent white, they met, before the hour appointed for the fête, to compare with youthful interest the costumes they had selected, and which were so nearly alike that the wearers might have passed for sisters. There was, strictly speaking, no resemblance between them, yet it would have been difficult to say which was the lovelier — Beatrice in her regular classical outline of face and form, or Constance in the varied charms of her expression, and the graceful beauty of every movement, glance, and smile.

At an hour earlier than usual they departed for the Palais Royal, and had hardly crossed the Place du Carrousel, when a dense crowd surrounded their carriages, through which it appeared almost impossible to penetrate. In vain the privileged of the long and slowly-moving file pleaded the authority of their *laissez passer*, and attempted to advance; it was literally and physically impossible. The curiosity of the populace had been thoroughly aroused to see something of an entertainment in which they felt a certain interest, from the popularity of the princely host, and of which they had heard and seen details, in anticipation, that equalled in marvels all they had ever heard or read of the "Arabian Nights."

The heterogeneous multitude threw themselves around every vehicle that passed, in spite of warnings of the *gens-d'armes*, who in vain attempted to keep them at bay. They mounted even upon the wheels, peering curiously at the *persons* within, as the equipages slowly passed, and paused, *while traversing the whole length of the streets leading to the ducal residence.*

"This is fearful," said Beatrice to Constance, with a shudder, as a woman more bold than the rest of the crowd by which she was surrounded, sprung on the wheel of the carriage, and looked in daringly and admiringly at her and her young companion. "These savage-looking creatures quite terrify me. I marvel at your composure?"

"It is very unpleasant to be gazed at by them in this manner, I confess," replied Constance, "and their bronzed and hardened features remind one of the days of the Revolution, when such women, as history records, were often the chief actors in the tragedies of that unhappy period. I trust we shall soon be relieved from this uncomfortable condition, for it is anything rather than agreeable. May we not draw down the curtains, dear mother, and prevent this impatient scrutiny?"

She was suiting the action to the word, when her mother gently stopped her hand.

"I think it would be but fair to exclude this prying curiosity," said Mrs. Melville, "but there seems to be a settled purpose on the part of the multitude to have their own share of the entertainment; and I should really have some apprehensions that such a movement might provoke them, in their disappointment, to break the glasses (accidentally they would call it), by way of revenge. It is safer to be patient, disagreeable as the alternative is. I trust our journey is now near its conclusion."

"How very savage some of these people look!" exclaimed Beatrice. "How entirely different from anything we see in civilized crowds. The rough and toil-stained aspect of the men one can pardon, as in their sordid occupations they cannot well avoid it. But to see such women is indeed terrible."

"The *Dames de la Halle*," replied Constance, "as I suppose some of them are, in their present condition, are certainly shocking specimens of the softer sex; and these market-women seem to be as celebrated here as the ladies of Billingsgate, who serve so often to adorn a proverb if not 'a tale.' Neither do much honour to the refined civilization of the countries they inhabit."

"The world, we may hope, is gradually growing more conscious of its faults as well as of its wants," said Mrs. Melville, "and we may hope that in process of time even these ladies, or at least their successors, may be civilized. The great are happily becoming daily more sensible of the dangers of ignorance and its attending vices, and interest

may effect what philanthropy alone vainly tries to teach. A mass of servile ignorance is a reproach to any country, though unfortunately all have to bear the burden in some form or other. It is only by elevating those below them, and enabling them to fulfil properly the duties of their station, that the great can hope to escape what would otherwise be the terrible consequences of their own indolence and neglect."

"But there is an air of ferocity and hardihood about these people," said Beatrice, as she again shrunk from their bold gaze, "that is alarming to one as little accustomed to see them in crowds as I am. It is really revolting to me!"

"And yet," said Constance, "there may be among them some that are better than they appear, and who would be marvellously changed by kindness and civilization. We have recently experienced an instance of this. You saw me yesterday speaking to the gardener who so tenderly watches over my favourite flowers?"

"Yes," replied Beatrice, "and I was pleased to see the deferential manner in which he listened to your instructions about them. But he is quite a different person from those we see here. He looks always clean and cheerful and healthy, and seems to be particularly respectful."

"And yet poor Antoine was as wretched a sample of humanity as any of these," said Constance, "when we first knew him last winter; but we had an opportunity of showing him some kindness, and it has left the traces you have remarked."

"We have fallen into a philanthropical and philosophical discussion," said Mrs. Melville, smiling. "The gay crowds assembling at the Palais Royal little know what wise heads are about to appear among them on such fair young shoulders. But here we are, at last, within the court of the palace. It is indeed illuminated with unusual brilliancy!"

They passed around the court and entered the palace, where hundreds, it might be said thousands, of splendidly attired persons were filling every room of the long and magnificent suite.

"You have not yet been presented to the duchess and her lovely family, I think you told us," said Constance to Beatrice, as they ascended the stairway.

"No," replied Beatrice; "I have never seen them, though I have often heard my father expatiate on their charms, especially those of the second daughter of the duke, for whom *my father has a peculiar admiration, as she has devoted herself to sculpture, an art of which he is so passionately fond.*"

They passed on, and entered the rooms. The duke and duchess, surrounded by their family, stood in the principal salon to receive their guests. With graceful and distinguishing courtesy they welcomed the group that now advanced toward them. In the tall and elegant young cavalier who had accompanied her lovely friend Marie, on her first visit, Beatrice recognized the Duke de Chartres, the eldest son of the Duke of Orleans. His second daughter met her with the sweet smile that chased away the pensive expression of her dark eyes. Beatrice beheld her gentle incognita friend in—the Princess Marie!

This happy discovery effectually banished the trepidation with which the lovely Beatrice had entered on a scene so new to her, and the evening was one of unmixed enjoyment to the young persons who participated in its pleasures. Some of those who had seen more of life appeared less fascinated.

"This heated atmosphere cannot be very salutary for one so delicate as yourself, madame," said Mrs. Melville to a lady of high rank, who seemed greatly fatigued, and had sunk for repose upon the sofa on which she had taken a seat.

"Ah, ma chère!" she replied, "what can one do? It is easier to come and see this splendid fête myself, than to stay at home to receive the visits and condolence of all my acquaintance, who, perceiving that I was not here, would charitably come en masse to fatigue me still more by giving me a description of the glories I had missed."

The favourite amusement of the evening was found in making what was styled the *grand tour*,—the promenade around the long gallery filled with exotic flowers and illuminated with coloured lamps. The sovereigns of France and Naples, with their respective suites, led the way, and paused a moment to look on the strange spectacle that offered itself to their view in the garden below them.

In that garden no less than forty thousand of the populace, availing themselves of the privilege granted them, had assembled; and the upturned features, though not plainly discernible by the illumination of the lamps, were sufficiently revealed to give them a sinister and unpleasant effect. No hearty cries of "Vive le Roi!" greeted the appearance of their sovereign,—but a deep low murmur was heard among that mighty mass, like the muttering of thunder before the approaching storm.

What were the ominous words that reached the ear of majesty, though thus muttered rather than expressed? Those words were—"A bas les Bourbons."

CHAPTER XXV.

NINA—A CATASTROPHE.

AN ingenious and spirited writer has recently made some remarks on the metropolis of France, which merit a more enduring form than the ephemeral one graced by his lively pen. He justly observes that this city has so often been described by scribbling travellers, under its various aspects of noon, afternoon, evening and night, that people are as well acquainted with Paris as the white-armed Helen was with its namesake.

"But," he adds, "we have never heard of Paris in the morning, undressed, unshaven, uncured and uncomfortable, for the simple reason that no one has ever been up early enough to see it in that condition."

After other similar reflections the writer says, "There is a melancholy beauty about this unenjoyed freshness, this unheeded sunshine of the day's childhood; and morning in a city where man's works are, and man himself is not visible, if less beautiful, is scarcely less interesting than day dawning on the Righi or the Pyramids."

Without pretending to the extreme of poetic sensibility that would have fully appreciated these unenjoyed beauties by beholding them at the day-dawning, some lovers of early hours have occasionally discovered the fascination which the writer describes,—a fascination which lingers long enough to make a very early walk through the garden of the Tuileries delightful, as well as salutary.

At this hour the garden had peculiar attractions for Constance, who, sometimes under the protection of her mother or Madame Laval, sometimes in company with Beatrice, found healthful and pleasing exercise beneath its shades. The gay world was then asleep, and the garden was a lovely desert. Occasionally, during their walk, they saw the gardeners engaged in the delicate task of cultivating the fine varieties of flowers that ornamented the parterres.

Constance often observed Antoine occupied in this manner; and sometimes near the spot where he was at work, his little ones were gambolling. As she passed by one morning, the eldest of this little group, a child hardly six years old, advanced timidly, and taking her hand, kissed it fervently *with an expression of deep reverence.*

"Who can say that none of these people have gratitude or

feeling?" said Constance to her mother. "The trifling sacrifice I made last winter for poor Antoine, and of which I have heard so much since, as an act of heroism, that I am quite ashamed of it, seems to have made an ineffaceable impression not only on him, but on all his family. I have not met with this little girl since the day when he brought his wife and children to see us, yet she seems to recollect and to love me."

"We cannot always understand the circumstances in which the poor are placed," returned her mother, "and this may have been a peculiar case of distress from which relief may have been, as Antoine expressed it, as if an angel had brought him help in his greatest need. It will be an encouragement to you in your journey through life, to find at least some hearts on which a kindly impression may be made. It would be unreasonable to expect gratitude always, for it is a delicate plant, and one of celestial growth, which seldom takes root in the stony hearts of this world. Wherever I find it, I am always certain that it is the harbinger of noble qualities, whether in the humble or the great."

"There are some fine qualities that grow where the soil seems sadly neglected," said Constance; "and I never see Nina de St. Clair without wishing that she had a fairer opportunity of cultivating her mind and heart. In my brief acquaintance with her, I have found her apparently amiable as she is pretty. You observe her with her governess there below this terrace, taking, like ourselves, an early walk."

Constance and her mother were walking on the terrace, and nearly screened from observation by the leafy canopy of trees cut into the form of a *berceau*. At this unusually early hour they were the only visitors in the garden, except Nina de St. Clair and her governess, who were together below.

To the surprise of Constance, a man stepped warily from the umbrageous shelter of the neighbouring trees and joined them. The governess lingered, as if purposely, behind; and the stranger and Nina de St. Clair were soon engaged in earnest conversation.

The person of this stranger, as Constance caught a glimpse of him through the trees as they passed on, seemed to her far from prepossessing or agreeable. He was neither young nor handsome. There was an easy familiarity in his address that might have passed for courtly grace to one unused to the ways of the world; but to a practised eye, the impostor was plainly seen beneath so flimsy a disguise. A dark, full beard and moustache concealed many of the lines of a face

which gave, in the features that were visible, an impression as dark and sinister as the face itself.

He continued conversing with deep earnestness with Nina de St. Clair, until the simultaneous arrival of the two groups at the end of the terrace, startled Nina and her companion. The man retreated hastily, and Nina, with an inexpressible degree of confusion in her countenance and manner, seemed to hesitate whether to make an equally precipitate retreat, or to attempt some explanation of the singular circumstance she naturally supposed would awaken curiosity, if not suspicion. The latter determination seemed the one she had adopted, for she advanced with affected gaiety to meet Constance and her mother.

With her pretty cheeks still flushed by ill-concealed emotion, Nina de St. Clair approached, and after paying her compliments to Mrs. Melville, linked her arm within that of Constance and walked by her side. The governess, in confusion scarcely less than that of her pupil, came up at the same moment. Mrs. Melville permitted the young ladies to walk on, and to converse at their ease, without interrupting them, taking that opportunity of making some inquiries concerning an academy with which the governess informed her she had once been connected, and which a friend had requested her to make.

"I am so happy to meet you this fine morning!" said Nina to Constance. "I wish we could find you here every day; I am so tired of Madame Costelle!"

"Indeed?" replied Constance, with a smile; "but you seem to have other persons to converse with you sometimes in your walks. Pray who was the person who quitted you so abruptly at the moment we met with you?"

"Oh!" said Nina, hurriedly, "that was a very agreeable and distinguished person. You doubtless have often seen him before."

"I do not recollect ever to have seen him before," said Constance. "But how is he so distinguished?"

Nina looked round anxiously, as if to see how near her governess was to them before she replied.

"I am glad to see that Madame Costelle is too far to overhear all we are talking about," she said, "for her ears are like those of an angel, as the word is spelled in French, only without the *g*. But I am glad she knows nothing of English. She might, however, catch a few words of our conversation, if she knew we were talking about her."

"We were not speaking of Madame Costelle," said Con-

stance ; "and I confess I am surprised at the small degree of respect she seems to have inspired, since you have just compared her ears with those of a donkey."

"Well, they are in truth nearly as long," replied Nina, "and she is nearly as stupid. I think mamma engaged her for these very reasons. She says clever governesses are apt to be troublesome, and this one is useful as a maid-servant in certain respects, and makes some economy in the family."

"But, while you are discussing the merits of Madame Costelle," said Constance, amused at the childish ingenuity with which Nina sought to draw off her attention from the first subject of their conversation, "you have quite forgotten to answer my question. Who is the person with whom you were conversing when we met you just now?"

This was directly to the point, and not to be evaded, especially as Nina perceived, from the arch smile with which the question was propounded, that Constance had discovered the reluctance with which she returned to the subject.

"That gentleman," replied Nina, in a low voice, and again looking round to see if her governess was within hearing, "is the Chevalier Kriminelski. He is not French, but he is a person of great wealth and consequence in his own country. He informs me that he possesses unbounded influence there, and that his rank is so high that the lady he may marry will be little less than a duchess."

"My dear child!" said Constance, laughing, "this person looks to me more like a *chevalier d'industrie* than a chevalier anything else; how came you to be acquainted with him? Does Madame de St. Clair admit him in her circle?"

"No," replied Nina, flushing with anger at the uncere- monious expression of Constance in turning her admirer into a *chevalier d'industrie*, "the Chevalier Kriminelski has too much pride, as he tells me, to seek acquaintance with any one. He does not care about entering any society here, as he says strangers never receive the honours to which they are entitled."

"My dear Nina," said Constance, gravely, "I am very young to give you advice; but you are still younger than I am. Will you listen if I say something seriously to you?"

"Yes," replied Nina, "I will listen, for I believe you really like me, and that you will not say anything unkind to me. Don't say anything unkind, if you please," she continued, beseechingly, while her eyes filled with tears, "for I am very unhappy already."

"On the contrary," said Constance; "what I mean to say

will be dictated by the greatest kindness, for there is a mystery in what I have seen this morning that increases the interest I feel for you. This person, calling himself the Chevalier Kriminelski, I have once heard of before, and his name was then connected with circumstances that reflected anything but honour on his conduct. You inform me that your mother is not even acquainted with him, and yet you meet him clandestinely."

"And if I do meet with him accidentally," said Nina, in a hurried manner, "my conversations with him are encouraged by the governess under whose charge I am placed, so that it is no responsibility of mine."

"Wherever the responsibility lies," said Constance, "the consequences of these conversations, which seem to have made a certain impression, will be no less dangerous to you."

"You speak very solemnly," said Nina, affecting to smile, though the effort resulted only in a tremulous agitation of her petty lip; "one would suppose that the chevalier was making proposals to run away with me."

"I trust you would be too wise to listen to such overtures," replied Constance, "for, sad as an elopement always is, it is regarded in this country as a signal disgrace in any family where it occurs. A marriage here, to be legal, must be accompanied by many forms, and the consent of parents is indispensable to it. The romances that tell of people who run off to Gretna Green, or who have the fatal knot tied by the nearest magistrate, and without witnesses, are considered fabulous here. Such a step on the part of a young person leads to the most terrible consequences."

Nina shuddered. "It signifies little," she said in a low and mournful voice, "what may be the fate of one who is nothing to herself or any one else."

"You do not mean to apply that sad reflection to yourself, I hope," said Constance. "You have a mother to love and trust, and who doubtless loves you tenderly."

"You mean Madame de St. Clair, I suppose," answered Nina, bitterly;—"the lady that you will see to-day at two o'clock in the avenue of the Champs Elysées, reclining in her elegant calèche, splendidly attired, with a parasol *à la marquise* in her hand, and a lapdog on the front cushion, while I am probably walking at the same moment on the side pavement with Madame la Gouvernante. Do you call that lady my mother? Alas! I have no mother—God help me!" said the poor girl, and the tears fell like rain over her fair cheeks.

Constance was silenced. She knew not what consolation to offer to this young heart, full of natural affections, checked and withering under the chilling influences of neglect and coldness from the source whence all their warmth and light should have been derived.

"I did not mean to give you pain, Nina," she said in a gentle voice; "I trust you are convinced of that."

"Oh yes," replied Nina, "you have always been kind to me, and for that reason I will be kind to you, and tell you a conversation I overheard not very long ago between mamma and Miss Almeria Belmont about you."

The desire to escape from farther questioning on the subject of the chevalier was so obvious in this sudden turn of the conversation, that Constance made no effort to revert to it. She was relieved by observing that Nina could so soon banish the thoughts that had pained her so visibly.

"If you overheard the conversation," said Constance, "perhaps it was something not designed either for your ear or mine. It would be more honourable not to repeat it."

"I do not think either of those ladies would be so very scrupulous as you would be in such a case," said Nina. "So I insist that it is perfectly fair to tell you what they said. Almeria Belmont and mamma had one day a terrible quarrel about a letter that Almeria said she had sent to mamma, who, it appeared, had promised to burn it without reading it. Almeria insisted that, instead of burning the letter unsealed, as she had promised to do, mamma had read it, and told the contents to one of her friends."

"But this does not in any way concern me," said Constance, beginning to be weary of the gossiping narrative.

"It concerns you more nearly than you suppose," said Nina. "This letter had been previously sent to Mr. Reginald Villiers, as if by mistake, though it was done purposely that he might read it; and it was intended to convey the impression to him that you had been for a year past engaged to be married to Captain Delamere, a young English officer. Almeria was in a towering passion, and reproached mamma so bitterly, that mamma retorted by telling her that she was in love with Mr. Villiers herself."

"But here we are at the *grille*," she continued, "and we must now part, for it is nearly time for breakfast—adieu!"

Nina hurried off with her governess, and Constance rejoined her mother.

The childish gossip of Nina de St. Clair had explained in a few moments the apparently strange and wayward conduct

of Reginald. Constance perceived, from the light afforded her by this revelation, that there was some ground for the charge of Madame de St. Clair against Almeria Belmont, and she could not doubt that a systematic effort had been made to deceive Reginald into the belief that she loved another. Her young heart was lightened of a load of sad conjectures, for all that she had ever seen or heard of Reginald contradicted the idea that he could act with caprice or unkindness toward her. Shall we confess that other and softer feelings "stole across her busy thought?"

Constance was aroused from her reflections by a gentle pressure of her arm. She had walked on silently with that arm locked in her mother's, absorbed in sweet and bitter fancy, until they approached the bridge which lay in their homeward way, and the pressure induced her to look up.

Just before them was the same man Nina de St. Clair had been conversing with, and whom she had spoken of as the Chevalier Kriminelski. A nearer view did not improve the impression his appearance had first made. He was speaking in low and earnest tones to a handsome and well-dressed young woman who was walking by his side. Happening to glance furtively behind him, he perceived the presence of Mrs. Melville and her daughter, and, leaving his companion, walked rapidly forward, and was soon out of sight.

Mrs. Melville and Constance were now crossing the bridge. The young woman was still in advance of them. When she reached the middle of the bridge, she suddenly stopped, sprang on the parapet that guarded its side, and, tossing her arms upwards with a wild shriek of despair, plunged into the waters sixty feet below!

The cries of the persons on the river's banks, who were there engaged in their usual occupations, speedily drew numbers to the assistance of the unfortunate person. Alas! their efforts were vain,—the dark waters had closed over her, and her griefs and her wrongs. She had sunk to rise no more!

The shock that this terrible scene gave to Mrs. Melville and her daughter deprived them of the pleasure their early walks had afforded them, for it was impossible to pass the spot where it had occurred without recalling it.

The day had nearly passed away before Constance sufficiently recovered her composure to relate to her mother the conversation that had passed between Nina de St. Clair and herself. Mrs. Melville felt sincerely for the poor girl, *placed as she was*, by the neglect of a mother who ought to

have been her guide and protectress, in a position of such imminent peril. She resolved that on the following day she would call on Madame de St. Clair, and, at the risk of forfeiting her friendship, venture to inform her of the circumstances that were so well calculated to awaken maternal vigilance.

The next day, at the visiting hour, Mrs. Melville called on Madame de St. Clair. She was informed that Madame was in great distress. The sad cause was soon told,—Nina de St. Clair had eloped the preceding night with the dark and mysterious stranger!

The star of Madame de St. Clair was, by this event, extinguished in the hemisphere of fashion. The waif that had glittered for a few brief hours in the sunlight upon the shore, was washed away by the receding tide. Amid the gay circles where it had been her highest ambition to move, Madame de St. Clair was heard of no more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

OUR narrative must now make a slightly retrograde movement, and return to the incidents which succeeded the first thrilling event that occurred in the journey resolved upon by Reginald.

He delayed his departure from Sens, as has been already recorded, only long enough to be assured of the safety of Beatrice, and to see her clasped to her father's heart. When they turned to thank her young deliverer, whose agency in her preservation seemed to him so simple an act of humanity that it aroused no feeling of self-complacency in his mind, he was already wheeling out of the court, and rapidly continuing his route towards Italy.

The season was hardly far enough advanced to admit of travelling with comfort and safety amid the still wintry passes of the Alps, but there was no absolute danger in the undertaking, and Reginald determined to accomplish his journey by the most direct road.

He passed in safety over the bleak mountains, mantled with eternal snows, amid the gigantic rocks that cleave the vault of heaven with their rugged peaks; and, regardless of the overhanging avalanches that threatened him, pursued his onward way.

The southern side of the Simplon was attained without accident, and he soon left behind him those storm-worn regions that lower over the sunny plains below them, as if "scowling in jealous fury on a loveliness they are destined always to look upon, and never partake."

His rapid descent afforded brief space for admiration of the grandeur and sublimity of the wonderful works of nature around him,—its darker features brightened by the cascades pitching from the lofty rocks, and freshening with their sparkling waters and spray clouds the Alpine roses and feathery tufts of mountain fern, that found their way through the clefts at their base and softened their ruggedness as does a kindly smile seen at rare intervals on a stern human face.

The superb road pursuing its course amid these frowning fortresses, fathomless abysses, and thundering cataracts, offered an apt emblem of the genius of the mighty conqueror who had achieved such a victory over nature in the savage and pathless wilderness. Happy would it have been for the hecatombs of victims heaped upon the altar of his ambition, if all his conquests had been equally bloodless and equally beneficial!

The last snowy peak glittering in the sunlight gradually disappeared from Reginald's view, and the gigantic statue of St. Charles Borromeo announced to him that the Alpine passes no longer presented an obstacle to his progress, and that sunny Italy was stretched out in summer beauty before him.

During the past autumn he had lingered long among the fairy islands and terraced gardens that once boasted the presence of the saint. He had watched from the groves of citron and myrtle, that breathe perennial spring, the changing glories of Monte Rosa, when the setting sun gave to the peaks of the snow-capped mountain the ruby tint from which it takes its poetic name. But he was far happier wandering in those pleasing shades than at the present moment, when solitude and reflection combined to convince him that he had acted from an impulse unworthy of his mind and heart, in renouncing the hopes he had so fondly cherished. The longer he was left to meditate, the less was he satisfied with the course he had pursued.

Reginald paused at the city of Milan to make arrangements for his farther progress. Like the fairy islands, it had claimed his attention in his previous autumnal visit. But *the Cenacolo* could not be passed by unheeded, and again he looked on that magical work where, "beneath the veil of

ruin still gleams the lustre of a divineness of beauty and majesty which cannot, but by annihilation, die." The arch of Napoleon, the beautiful Duomo, the pride of Italy, with its gothic pinnacles of sculptured marble high in relief against the azure sky, the gorgeous relics of its interior, statuary, paintings—all lost their charms to Reginald, when compared with the only real vestige left of the crumbling and desecrated Cenacolo.

His interest in this fast fading but noble work of a master hand was shared by many strangers who daily visited the spot to take a last view of the perishing fresco, which they might never hope to look on again.

Among these strangers Reginald observed a young man of strikingly elegant mien, who several times looked toward him as if recognising an acquaintance, but withdrew his glance when he perceived no corresponding sign of recognition. While passing the last hour before his departure from Milan in his favourite contemplation, he perceived this stranger approaching him with an open letter in his hand.

"You will excuse the uncereemonious manner in which I present myself," he said to Reginald, with graceful courtesy. "I have twice called at your lodgings, but my visits were unsuccessful, and I followed you here."

"I have been also unfortunate in returning those visits," said Reginald with equal courtesy, "since it would have given me sincere pleasure to reciprocate the civilities of the Comte de Beaumanoir, if I remained longer in this city."

"I fear from that remark that you are about to leave Milan," said the comte. "I regret it sincerely, for it would occupy more time than you are willing to grant me, to express to you all the feelings of kindness and gratitude which the perusal of the letter in my hand has elicited toward you. This epistle," he continued, "is from the Comte de Visconti, whose name, as you are aware, is among the most distinguished of Milan. His lovely daughter is my affianced bride. When I think of the terrible fate from which your noble devotion and presence of mind saved one dearer to me than life, I cannot find words to express my emotions."

"You are less indebted to me than you imagine," said Reginald, smiling. "You forget the circumstances of that singular adventure. There was no sacrifice needed or made on my part, and the duty of rescuing beauty and innocence from the fangs of treachery and villainy became only a pleasure, and was too obvious in principle, and on that occasion too easy in practice, to awaken such enthusiasm."

"The miscreants!" exclaimed Beaumanoir, his eyes flashing fire at the recollection. "I cannot think of them without revolving plans of vengeance. I shall yet find this villain, and then, let him beware!"

"Your last word was precisely the one he addressed to me in our amicable parting at Sens," said Reginald, laughing. "A meeting with him might be more dangerous for me than for you, as I should probably have brief warning of an assault. The man's countenance wore a look of fiendish hatred, and he told me that he knew me, though I had no recollection of ever having seen him before."

"I hope to make his acquaintance at a future day," said the comte, "when I shall settle all scores for you as well as myself. But I have a thousand questions to ask, each one involving a thousand thanks to you. Cannot you delay your departure?"

"I regret that it is impossible," said Reginald. "I have promised a friend to meet him in Florence. He is probably awaiting my arrival there, in order to continue an extensive tour made at my suggestion, and I cannot disappoint him."

"Then I hope to meet you in Paris, where I shall be in a few weeks. My mission here, which was to unravel a conspiracy against the Comte de Visconti, is happily accomplished, and my return will not long be delayed." And with warm expressions and feelings of friendship and cordiality, he took his leave.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VEILED LADY.

ON his arrival in Florence, Reginald found, instead of the friend he had expected to meet, only a letter, informing him that an unforeseen occurrence had delayed his departure from Rome, and that several weeks would elapse before he could leave that city. This letter gave Reginald every assurance that he would find his friend at Genoa at the time he then proposed.

Happily for our traveller, there is no spot on earth where impatience may be more easily soothed or dispelled than in Florence,—fair Florence! where the stranger revels amid the greatest works of the greatest artists the world has ever seen—where nature shares the triumphs of art, and both are

beheld in their perfection of beauty. "At evening from the top of Fiesolè," attained by the smooth road winding through groves of cypress mingled with the tender verdure of the olives; amid the porticoes of festooned vines forming the "Etrurian shades," that "high overarched embower" its classic heights, and overlooking the castellated city with its towers and domes, standing "thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa," Florence shows fairest.

Reginald passed his evenings in these and similar contemplations of the lovely Val d'Arno. His mornings glided away in successive visits to the palazzi, the treasures of art, often absorbed among the concentrated glories of the Tribune, where riches are enshrined which pale those of Aladdin's lamp, even though not found in the form of sparkling gems. On every side they rise, those enduring memorials of hands which have "lost their cunning" for centuries. There stands the magic statue, still enchanting the world, though discoloured by time, and bearing the traces of barbarous desecration, repaired by the worshippers of art; there on the perishable canvas is stamped the impress of that heavenly thought that can never die, claiming affinity with ethereal spirits yet living, though long since passed from the scene of their earthly labours, and too often, alas! from the bitter trials that marked the earth-born but heaven-directed sons of genius.

The fine garden of the Palazzo Pitti, in its proximity to the galleries of paintings that offer attractions almost equal to the tribune of the Uffizzi, invites a comparison of the beauties of nature and art. Reginald indulged in dreamy meditations beneath the soft shades of the Boboli, even when the sun was in vertical splendour, or caught from different points of view, in his evening rambles through its walks, prospects almost as distant and as fair as those commanded from the summit of Fiesolè.

These rambles, after a sojourn of several weeks, had grown into a habit, and there were favourite spots where Reginald loved to linger, and which day after day he frequented. He was not naturally disposed to indolence, but there was something enervating in the soft summer air of this southern clime, and the cloudless sky, over which a light hazy veil seemed to be cast at mid-day, as if to soften the intensity of the sun's rays by partially intercepting them.

At that hour he sought the dense shades of the garden, and with a catalogue, or a volume of poetry as his companion, beguiled the quiet moments. At evening he was roused

from his dreamy languor by the freshening breeze that swept from the Apennines over the bosom of the Arno, and ascended to different heights to watch the gorgeous effect of the Italian sun "arraying in purple and gold the clouds that on his western throne attend."

In these excursions Reginald often encountered parties of wanderers, engaged like himself in observing the many objects of interest or curiosity that solicited their admiration.

The appearance of a stranger in his favourite haunts excited neither surprise nor special interest, even when the apparition came in the form of a lady, who returned day after day to one of the finest points of view, in the garden which he most frequented.

There was nothing peculiar in the aspect of this lady, and her dress, though neat and appropriate for a traveller, had no distinguishing features of the Italian costume to give it poetic or romantic interest. A figure that seemed youthful, from the elasticity of her step, was concealed by the ample folds of a silk mantle, and her simple hat of Tuscan straw was half covered by a veil, which served not only to preserve her complexion from the summer sun and air, but to screen her features entirely from view.

Even when engaged, as this lady often was, in sketching the distant landscape in an album, the veil was so disposed as to conceal her face, while her pencil was busily occupied in tracing the lines that had apparently awakened her enthusiasm.

Her visits were repeated daily to the same spot, and the sketch still remained unfinished, for after the pencil had followed the dictates of her hand and thought for half an hour at a time, the lines so carefully touched and retouched were impatiently rubbed out, as if the beautiful scene baffled her power to transfer it to her artistic repository.

This was all simple and natural, and there was nothing in the lady, or her veil, or her pencil, or her sketch that would have excited the least curiosity or interest under other circumstances. But Reginald was for the moment an idler, moreover he was an observer, and, as a feature in his evening prospect, the lady was expected by him at the hour and at the spot she always selected.

The fair stranger was one evening engaged in her usual occupation, and her interest in the landscape before her was evidently heightened by the light and shade thrown over it by a rising cloud, that at one moment partially excluded the

beams of the sun, leaving the valleys in deep shadow, while the mountain tops and even the towers and domes of the city glittered in the partial beams.

But the darker part of the picture soon predominated, and a peal of thunder startled the lady from her absorbing studies and occupation. Reginald had foreseen the catastrophe, but he was prepared to meet it, and it was a simple act of courtesy to offer the shelter of his large umbrella to protect the lady to her carriage, which he perceived was in waiting at the garden gate.

A thunder-shower from the clouds that suddenly rise over either Alps or Apennines, darkening the blue heaven of Italy, may well be classed among the events worthy of record in that sunny region, and the shower from which Reginald sheltered the veiled lady, formed no exception to the general rule.

There was neither time nor breath for ceremony while the pitiless torrent poured itself with unsparing fury above their heads, and the lady unhesitatingly accepted the supporting arm that directed her less confident steps amid the driving wind and rain. Happily the walk to her carriage was not long, and she was soon placed in safety, while Reginald, declining her polite proposal to offer him a shelter in her turn, hastened back to his lodgings.

The following day found the garden restored to freshness and verdure by the shower that had revived the thirsty trees and flowers. The sun shone with wonted lustre, and the azure heaven smiled on the heights that surround the city, and on the fair city itself, as brightly as if a cloud had never disturbed their serenity.

In the evening, Reginald almost unconsciously wandered to the spot where he had so often seen the incognita. She was there before him, and again busied with her pencil and her album. Reginald approached, and the lady rose from her seat, and thanked him, in courteous terms, for the important service he had rendered her the preceding evening.

In resuming her seat, which was one of the marble benches placed at convenient intervals throughout the garden, the lady gracefully invited Reginald to a seat near her.

"You are fairly entitled," she said, "to participate in all the pleasure I have derived from the lovely view which has so often exercised my pencil at this spot, since, but for your kind attention last evening, my poor album would have been drowned,—a fate, indeed, of which the owner herself ran no small risk."

She offered him the book, as she spoke. The sketch she had made of the landscape was executed with an artist's skill and taste. Reginald, as a connoisseur, expressed warm commendations of its superior merit.

"I congratulated myself yesterday evening," he said, "on my forethought in providing an umbrella which saved a lady's hat at least from the shower. If I had then seen the contents of this artistic volume, and known that I should be instrumental, however humbly, in preserving it from destruction, my self-complacency would have been doubled. Your skill shows that those who wander amid the enchantments of this fairy land imbibe its genius."

"Such wanderers," returned the lady, "can pretend to nothing but feeble imitations of a genius that seems to have lived once and only once, its brilliant rays being all concentrated on one period."

"It is true," said Reginald, "that the great Italian masters were contemporary, and that they have never since that epoch been equalled. But the subjects which inspired them are yet more enduring than their fame. These sacred subjects are immortal, and it may be hoped that the inspiration they once enkindled may be revived. Nature, too, is always before the eyes of genius; and if an artist might dip his brush in those gorgeous hues now gathering around the setting sun, as he sinks below that height, the triumphs of a Salvator or a Claude would not long stand unrivalled."

As Reginald spoke, he restored the album to its fair owner. The hand of the lady trembled visibly as she received it from him.

"You speak with enthusiasm," she said, with a deep sigh, "of the charms of nature; but there are those in this false and hollow world that are doomed to be the victims and dupes of art, even when they would learn of true wisdom to be wiser and better. You are not one of these. There is something that tells me you bear a charmed existence. It has been foretold of you that 'fire and flood' will pass you by and leave you unscathed and unharmed—that weapons of strife, if raised against you, shall fall harmless at your feet. You have a magician's power,—oh! do not use it unkindly!"

Reginald started. There was something in the voice and manner in which these words were spoken that he could not mistake, and the words themselves betrayed the speaker.

"A fair sorceress," he said, "once promised to shield me

from such evils. Another part of her own charm I would fain transfer to herself. The 'serpent's tooth' is sometimes concealed beneath the brightest flowers, and the fair sibyl would do well to pause and reflect before she ventures her happiness in paths where the venomous reptile may be hidden."

The reply of the lady was prevented by the arrival of a party of strangers, who at that moment approached the spot where she was sitting, and Reginald availed himself of the opportunity to retreat.

Reginald had paid his last visit to the beautiful garden. It had lost its power to enchain and enchant him. The following day he once more reviewed the galleries, the next he passed in calling on the acquaintances whose kindness had been extended to him during his sojourn in the beautiful city of flowers, and in less than a week he found himself in Genoa, awaiting the friend who had proposed to meet him there.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN ADVENTURE.

BEFORE his present visit to the city known by the grandiloquent title of *La Superba*, Reginald had thoroughly explored it. He had threaded its quaint narrow streets, looking like tunnels through mountains when contrasted with the overshadowing height of the houses, and inhabited before the picturesque attic in which he was again ceremoniously installed, having discovered from previous experience that this *observatory*, as it had once seemed to him, was designed not for the contemplations of astronomers, but for the superior comfort of astonished travellers.

Reginald well knew that the finest salons, the frescoed ceilings, the gilded furniture, the Genoese velvet and Venetian mirrors, are reserved for these lofty regions; and he was not surprised when his *eccellenza* was conducted up six flights of stairs to his apartments.

An epitome of the inhabitants of Genoa he saw daily in the piazza beneath his windows, where the busy crowd congregated, presenting a spectacle as curious as interesting.

It would have required no great effort of imagination to fancy the piazza "a stage, and all the men and women only

players." The peasantry with their grotesque costumes, muleteers with their long and heavily-burdened trains, monks and priests, naval officers in glittering uniforms, sailors of all nations, watching the performance of some mountebank, or dancing to the music of his grinding organ; while ladies, in their long white veils, glided gracefully and fearlessly through the mingled throng, their picturesque attire and elegant mien contrasting strangely with the rougher features of the scene.

A few days were still to intervene before the friend whose companionship was promised him could arrive, and these were profitably passed in examining whatever of interest Reginald had premitted in his former visit.

But at the end of this time a greater disappointment than that he had met with at Florence, came to him in the city of palaces. On the day appointed for the arrival of his friend, Reginald again received a letter informing him that the sudden illness of a brother had necessarily changed his plans, and that he would be compelled to abandon the hope of continuing his travels under the pleasant auspices he had anticipated.

Reginald, though deeply regretting the cause on his friend's account, was perhaps less disappointed than he acknowledged to himself, for he had, from the first moment of his rash resolution, almost unconsciously indulged a fond wish to retrace his steps; and this obstacle now removed, a fair opportunity was afforded him of following the dictates of his inclination, without subjecting him to the imputation of caprice. His plans were soon matured, and he resolved to return by Marseilles directly to the French capital.

Variety was the only motive that induced Reginald to prefer the sea to the land route, for the celerity that now makes it preferable offered no inducement at that period. A Genoese vessel bound for Marseilles was to leave the port the morning after he received the letter that determined his course, and his arrangements for the brief voyage were easily completed.

His last day in Genoa was passed in revisiting the superb palaces and churches which give the name to the city it so proudly boasts. He was lingering near twilight in the *San Siro*, where the rays of the setting sun had given him only light enough to distinguish the lifelike figures of its frescoes, and the shadowy forms had assumed a sort of mysterious interest. His meditations were interrupted by his guide, *who warned him that the hour had arrived for closing the doors of the church.*

As Reginald passed out he was preceded by a noble looking man, who was apparently, like himself, a stranger, and had been, as he was, engaged in examining the fine frescoes of the *San Siro*. He paused at the portal of the church to reward his guide, and Reginald recognised Captain Delamere.

They had been presented to each other by Mrs. Melville on the eventful morning of their meeting at the Louvre, and Reginald, now convinced that his suspicions had been groundless, cordially reciprocated the kind salutation with which Captain Delamere met him.

"I shall ever retain the liveliest remembrance of my brief visit to your country," said Captain Delamere, as they shook hands warmly before parting. "I am now on my way to join my regiment in India, and a soldier's life is too full of uncertainty for me to hope that I may ever return to you."

Reginald acknowledged the courtesy of his adieus, and with kindly expressed and sincerely felt good wishes they parted.

The following morning proved bright and cloudless, and Reginald embarked in the Genoese vessel in which he had taken his passage for Marseilles. He was a practised and fearless sailor, and thought little of the discomfort around him, while he stood looking from the deck at the receding beauties of the city of palaces, among which the Doria, with its entourage of gardens and gleaming statuary, was most conspicuous.

The semicircular amphitheatre of hills, crowned with fortifications, that suggests the name of the *Crescent City*, lessened gradually on his view, and the deep blue waves of the Mediterranean rippled calmly on, challenging the eye and ear as the only objects of sight and sound now within reach. Occasionally the deep hoarse voice of a sailor, or the motion of a rope, broke the stillness that would otherwise have permitted Reginald to remain, without interruption, absorbed in the reverie into which he had fallen.

The mysterious stranger he had met with in Florence had thrown a light over his path, which had been before darkened by a spell that he could not comprehend nor shake off. He felt satisfied that he had been purposely misled,—with what object, he would have been blind indeed not to suspect. His recent meeting with Captain Delamere had dispelled every doubt, and he ardently longed for the time when he might acknowledge his error, and ask forgiveness for his apparent caprice and injustice. The lovely being he had for a moment supposed capable of deceiving him was now freed from every suspicion, and resumed her empire over his heart. Bright blossoms of the future were, in imagination,

strewed in his pathway of life, and as he looked out on the glittering waves around him, he almost fancied their brilliancy a type of the happy days and years that would thus follow each other in calmness and beauty.

The morning passed away, and Reginald was aroused from the reflections, in which he continued to indulge throughout the day, by the heavy tread of the commander of the vessel, who was pacing the deck near him, apparently remarking with deep interest some distant object. Perceiving that his anxious gaze had attracted the attention of Reginald, he paused, and with evidently assumed nonchalance, made some unimportant observation, and passed on.

The light words, and the earnest expression that preceded them, were so strongly contrasted, that Reginald was induced to look with some interest in the direction in which the man had been gazing. The sun was sinking low, and was already partially obscured by a dense mass of black clouds, tinged on their edges by the red light of the beams that threw a fitful brilliancy across the slowly swelling billows. A heavy stillness pervaded the air, and the crowded canvas flapped idly against the masts.

It needed no prophet to foretell the approach of a storm, which already began to be announced by the muttering of distant thunder. Slowly and languidly the vessel moved on, until a slight but sudden gust of wind restored life and motion both to the vessel and the sailors.

All was now bustle and activity. The gale freshened until it blew a perfect hurricane. The night continued dark and tempestuous, but the approach of morning broke the spell, and the wind gradually subsided as the dawn appeared.

The sun arose in full splendour, and the vessel pursued her steady way, though the commander announced that she had been driven far out of her course.

The sound of "sail, ho!" from the mainmast broke on the monotony of this day, so unexpectedly added to the voyage by the tempest of the preceding night; and Reginald watched with lively interest the approach of a vessel bearing the broad white flag of France, that gleamed in the morning sun.

Nearer she came, until he could clearly discern her graceful outline, sweeping like some aquatic bird with its white wings over the bosom of the deep. But, to his *surprise*, when within speaking distance, the few officers on the deck in the uniform of the French navy suddenly disappeared, and all was left in ominous silence, though she still

approached the Genoese vessel so closely that they were almost in contact.

This mysterious movement was followed by another far less equivocal and more appalling. In an instant, and as if by magic, the deck swarmed with the swarthy faces and formidable scimitars of a crowd of Algerines, who, throwing off the mask they had assumed, replaced the snowy flag with one of a blood-red colour, and the commander of the now plainly revealed pirate ship imperiously demanded the surrender of the Genoese vessel.

A few minutes sufficed to place her at the mercy of the Algerines, and so briefly and systematically was the transfer of everything valuable made to them, that Reginald felt convinced that the commander of the Genoese vessel was in league with the pirate to deliver the spoils into his hands.

Distrusting both equally, he resolved not to allow himself to be transferred among the chattels of the two miscreants, as he deemed them. Calling on the few men around him who seemed to share in his feelings to aid him in a struggle for their freedom, with a sudden and successful effort he wrested a weapon from one of the assailants, who now crowded around him, and used it with such power and dexterity that a passage was soon cleared before him.

The Algerine commander looked with evident admiration at the calm and determined bravery with which Reginald kept off the dastardly crowd. He thrust aside the turbaned heads and uplifted weapons which interposed between them, and approached more nearly.

"It is in vain to contend," he said. "You must be at last overcome by numbers. Violence will only lead to violence,—you are safe if you provoke it no farther."

There was a certain air of frankness in the countenance of the chief, which gave a better assurance than his words of the sincerity of his intentions. A moment's reflection convinced Reginald that resistance was vain. He might hope to escape from captivity if he incensed these lawless plunderers no farther, but there would be no refuge from their vengeance, if he refused to listen to the terms now offered him.

The commander spoke a few words to his followers in the Moorish tongue, and motioned to Reginald to follow him. The Genoese vessel, lightened of all that was valuable, was permitted to depart with her sailors and commander. Reginald and a few other persons, who might have been witnesses against both, were taken on board the Algerine. No violence was offered them, and the pirate ship was soon

again skimming the surface of the sea, as lightly as a hawk in the air after she has secured her quarry.

"It is the will of Allah!" said the commander resignedly, as the Genoese vessel moved off. "I owe this to *La Superba* for her persecutions. They have only received the punishment they deserved."

The soliloquy was uttered in the Spanish tongue, and Reginald comprehended the import of his words. There was something chivalrous in the deportment of this man towards him which exempted him from the feeling of utter repugnance, with which he regarded the piratical crew about him. The chief had evidently seen better days, for there was a certain air of dignity, mingled with the elastic grace of form which yet distinguishes the descendants of the Spanish Arab, while the purity of the language he spoke betrayed him still farther.

"You are my prisoner," he said, throwing himself negligently on a piece of Persian carpeting, which he had ordered to be placed on the deck for the accommodation of Reginald as well as himself, "you are my prisoner; but you shall see that, pirate as you and others would call me, you cannot surpass me in courtesy, though you may equal me in courage."

"I owe you my acknowledgments," said Reginald, in the same careless tone; "but in truth I do not know that you merit them, since your courtesy would have availed me little without the aid of my own good arm. I am, however, as you say, your prisoner, and I think there is that in your bearing to which I may trust."

A gleam of pride and satisfaction lighted up the swarthy features of the Moor as Reginald spoke; but it was chased away by an expression of deep sadness while he said, as if soliloquizing,—

"The children of the outcast Hagar are doomed to war upon their brethren, yet it need not be that their hands should be always imbrued with their blood. Persecuted alike in the desert or on the boundless wastes of the ocean, can it be deemed strange that they should seek the redress of their wrongs, wherever it may be found?"

"I know not what injuries you may have to avenge," said Reginald, who chose to consider these words addressed to himself, though the Moor seemed to have uttered them almost unconsciously, while absorbed in his own painful reflections; "but you appear to me to have a lawless manner of seeking justice."

"Law and justice!" reiterated the Moor with bitterness. "What have the descendants of Ishmael to do with either? Even when they have left their own trackless wilds to dwell in Christian lands, have they not been exiled from their adopted homes, and driven forth as fugitives to the ends of the earth? What are our crimes in comparison with those of nations, who, calling themselves Christian, with hardly a shadow of pretext violate law and justice, and without remorse continually pursue their deadly work of desolation and robbery?"

"Your reasoning is plausible," said Reginald, "and well befits an outlaw. Yet there seems to me something in your tone and bearing that speaks of worthier things. You were not born to be a pirate,—far better it would have been for you to have chosen some humble occupation of honest labour, than in this fearful vocation to outrage all the kindlier feelings of your nature."

The Moor started to his feet, and laid his hand on the jewelled dagger that lay half-concealed in the folds of cashmere twisted around his waist. His dark eye kindled with anger amounting to ferocity, and an expression of haughty scorn curled his lip.

"You know not to whom this insult is addressed," he said, proudly drawing up his form to its full height. "No servile drudgery will ever be performed by the hand of one of my race. The shade of Feri de Ben Estepar would stalk abroad to rebuke such profanation. But our views are too widely separated to meet."

He turned away as he uttered the last words, and walked hastily to the extremity of the deck, leaving Reginald to his own meditations.

Slowly and heavily the day passed away to him. The sun disappeared beneath the ocean waves, and one by one a gleaming star came forth in the blue vault above, reflected on the deeper blue of the sea. A dim outline of the distant shore came gradually on his view, though hardly visible in the deepening gloom of night. Still the vessel held on her steady way, and as if impelled by some magical and unseen power, in profound silence and almost in darkness neared the shore.

A boat was lowered with the same silence and celerity, and Reginald, with the persons who had been taken at the same time with himself in the vessel, was hurried on the land. He found himself in a short time alone with the chief, whose orders had apparently been fully understood

before their disembarkation ; such was the despatch and order with which the arrangements had been conducted.

He motioned to Reginald to accompany him, and with rapid steps they passed over the sandy beach until they arrived at the outskirts of a rude village. With the same silence and promptitude the chief entered a low building, and reappeared in a few minutes, leading two Arabian horses. Throwing the bridle of one to Reginald, he mounted the other, and waved his hand forward.

Reginald followed the direction indicated, and they swept together over the sandy plain. The dreary aspect of the coast gradually disappeared, and by the light of the rising moon he perceived some appearance of vegetation in the higher country they were now approaching.

The Moor dismounted at the foot of a rocky hill, and motioning to Reginald to follow his example, secured the horses within a shed apparently constructed for the purpose, and led the way over a steep path among the rocks. Their route became more rugged as they proceeded, but the Moor did not slacken his pace until the pathway seemed suddenly closed by a rude buttress of solid rock, which rose before them.

With some difficulty they passed around this obstacle through the thickly matted shrubs at its base, and found themselves opposite a small door which the Moor unlocked, and secured with jealous care as soon as they entered. The faint light permitted Reginald only to perceive the irregular outline of a large building within the spacious court, through which they passed with the same rapid and noiseless steps.

Another door was opened with equal caution, and secured as the first had been, when, by the light of a dim lamp suspended from the ceiling, Reginald found himself in a large but comfortless apartment, furnished only with a few cushions scattered negligently on the floor. The small grated windows gave it the appearance of a prison, and this idea was painfully confirmed when the Moor with a sudden movement extinguished the single lamp, and Reginald heard the sound of the cautiously closing door, as he withdrew from the room.

It may be presumed that the reflections presented by this new aspect of his situation were coloured with a sombre shade. It was apparent that the feeling of goodwill, with which the Moor had at first regarded him and interposed to *save his life*, had received a check, if it had not indeed been *entirely extinguished*, by the freedom with which Reginald

had expressed himself in their conversation of the morning. But his was a spirit full of buoyancy and life, and accustomed to look on every event on the brightest side. Fatigued with the exertions and vicissitudes of the day, he commended himself to a strength more powerful and an eye more watchful than his own, and throwing himself on the lowly and comfortless resting-place allowed him, fell into a deep and heavy slumber.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN OASIS IN AN AFRICAN DESERT.

THE morning was far advanced before Reginald awoke from the profound sleep which succeeded the fatigue and anxiety of the preceding day. The cheerful beams of the sun could not penetrate the low windows of his prison, but they afforded him light enough to discern his situation, and to perceive that, during his profound slumber, provision had been made, as far as circumstances allowed, for his comfort, and that a meal, far more luxurious than a prisoner could have expected, was prepared in a small outer room, as jealously locked as the one he had occupied.

The attentions thus shown him proved that no immediate evil was to be apprehended, farther than that to which he was already condemned, but there was something of sinister import in all that surrounded him. He remembered the sullen silence the Moor had preserved during the whole time that had succeeded their conversation, and, as the day wore slowly by, Reginald found his anticipations of the future becoming hourly more gloomy. As the night drew on, the total darkness in which he was left exercised its usually depressing influence.

"It was folly," he murmured, "to intrust myself to the mercy of such treacherous hands. Far better it would have been to die defending my life and freedom, than to perish here in miserable captivity!"

To the wearied soul "sleep seems the only refuge." Happily the wearied body obeyed the impulse, and Reginald again sought its influences on his lowly couch, and forgot the evils of the present and the gloom of the future. All was buried in calm and peaceful oblivion. Hours passed away in that dull still spot, and everything around him was silent as the night.

A faint gleam of light, falling momentarily on his closed eyelids, partially restored him to a consciousness of existence. Again it flashed, feebly but certainly, and he awoke.

For a moment Reginald found it impossible to realize the radiant vision that met his awakening glance, yet there it stood, bright, beautiful, motionless. Again he looked more earnestly, and the dark and brilliant eyes, which had at first met his astonished gaze, sunk beneath their long jetty lashes.

What being of light had thus penetrated the cheerless walls of his prison? Yet it was evidently a creature of earth's mould, for, as she raised one hand to shade the small perfumed lamp held in the other, the light was thrown more perfectly on her own face and form. Fair as a Moorish maiden might be, the features which a jealous but transparent veil permitted to be seen were symmetrical and expressive, and were still surpassed by the grace of her light elastic form. Her redundant and glossy hair, dark as the raven's wing, was braided with sparkling gems and oriental flowers. The flowing folds of a robe of purest white were confined around her waist by a zone elaborately embroidered in Arabic characters, with threads of gold curiously inwrought with precious gems.

Perceiving that Reginald was about to utter an exclamation, expressive of his astonishment at this unexpected apparition, the maiden raised her hand with a warning gesture, and hastily pressing her finger to her lip, as if to impose silence, retreated towards the half open door by which she had entered, and indicated to him that he was at liberty to follow.

Reginald unhesitatingly availed himself of the opportunity of escape thus offered. Whatever adventures might be in store for him, they could not present a more unpromising aspect than those he had anticipated during the brief period of his imprisonment; and there was, moreover, a romance in the manner of his liberation that gave it an additional charm in his eyes.

Abandoning himself to the direction of his beautiful guide, who still in profound silence led the way, he followed her footsteps, while, lightly as a young antelope, she glided over a narrow pathway, roughly paved with stone.

The moon was riding high in the cloudless heaven, and revealed every object by her silvery light almost as distinctly as if the day had dawned. The snow-white robe of his guide, fluttering in the summer breeze, alone indicated to

Reginald the route he was pursuing,—such were its serpentine windings through the thick shrubbery on either side.

Though following rapidly and closely on her footsteps, for an instant, and at a sudden turn, he lost sight of the white robe of his conductress, which had until then illuminated his path and directed his steps. He bounded forward with renewed speed, but he looked for her in vain. Like some aerial visitant she had appeared, and as suddenly vanished, it seemed into air.

Confident, however, that there must be some more substantial reason for this apparent mystery, Reginald advanced to the spot where she had disappeared, and perceived a small door half concealed by the tangled thicket. Through this entrance he felt satisfied that his guide had vanished, and he unhesitatingly followed. She was nowhere visible, but other objects now attracted his attention and surprise.

Nature and art seemed to have rivalled each other in the creation of the scene that opened before him. The air was laden with the rich perfume of the citron and orange trees, whose white blossoms overhung the smooth walk, bordered with flowers of every variety of beauty, which he was now pursuing. The verdant turf was preserved in its freshness by fountains of crystal purity, throwing up their sparkling jets, and falling in refreshing showers, formed again into small rivulets, flowing with a gentle murmur over their mosaic beds.

The minutest and most delicate care seemed to mark every part of this spot of surpassing loveliness, which might have been imagined a chosen abode of the inhabitants of fairyland.

Reginald advanced slowly through this scene of enchantment, whose beauties were enhanced by the strange contrast of all around him with the rudeness of the entrance. On emerging from the fragrant shades of the citron and orange, he found himself opposite a pavilion surrounded by a colonnade of sculptured marble, gleaming in the bright moonlight. No sound was heard within, and it was with some hesitation that he entered the door, invitingly open before him.

There was in truth but little to awaken alarm, for the luxurious delicacy of the scene within excelled that through which he had just passed.

The large circular room he first entered was surrounded by a number of other apartments communicating with it, yet all apparently destined for the same occupant, as their

open doors seemed to indicate. A delicious coolness was diffused through this spacious vestibule by a jet of purest water, which rose in the centre of the room, and falling into a large marble vase, surrounded with freshly-blooming flowers, was lost in a subterranean passage beneath the tessellated pavement.

The soft light diffused through the room came not from the lustre, but from vases of alabaster, so disposed as to display the arabesque ceiling to the greatest advantage, without offending the eye by its rays. A fine Flora and a Pomona on either side, the one offering her garland of flowers, the other her more substantial emblems, seemed to be the presiding divinities of the place; and, as Reginald paused at the entrance, he almost imagined their chiselled beauties gifted with life.

He crossed the entrance-room, and advanced toward one of those adjoining it. The same display of luxury was there. For an instant he fancied he heard a light footstep,—he listened,—there was no sound but that made by the gushing fountain and the breath of the summer wind, as it swept lightly in and rustled among the folds of Persian silk that tapestried the walls and draped the windows.

Nor amid this seeming haunt of fairies had the comfort essential to mortals been forgotten. The luxurious couch—the oriental bath—the array of sumptuous apparel in the Moorish fashion, and lastly, a delicate repast of choicest viands, and fruits, and costly wines,—all these disposed with sedulous care in the various apartments, seemed prepared for the use of an unexpected and honoured guest.

The inhospitable and uncourteous treatment he had met with on his first arrival, disposed Reginald to act with but little ceremony; yet he felt a certain repugnance to intruding, he knew not where, nor upon whom. Had the same time been allowed him for reflection, when he so unexpectedly found himself imprisoned, the Moor would not have found such facility in executing his design; but it had been the work of an instant, and the bolt was drawn before his strength or skill could have availed for his deliverance.

The whole scene was now changed—by what magic he knew not. The pavilion was untenanted and inviting; but it might be only a decoy, and end in costing him his life.

His doubts were, however, partly dispelled by observing, as a rapid glance enabled him to do, that each article of his own property had been conspicuously disposed in one of the apartments, as if to indicate to him, in a manner not to be

misunderstood, that he was to consider himself the guest for whom this luxury was prepared. The coincidence was too pleasing to be rejected, and without further scruple he availed himself of the privileges offered, and soon again found in quiet repose the temporary oblivion of his perplexities.

The birds were warbling their morning roundelay, and the sun pouring a flood of golden light on every object, as Reginald came from the pavilion to inhale the fresh air, after passing a night of such strange vicissitudes.

He traversed the beautiful grounds surrounding it in every direction; but, notwithstanding the marks of minute care lavished on them, no person appeared. On farther examination he found that the extent of these grounds was made to seem greater than the reality, by the consummate art of their arrangement, and that they were bounded on every side by a wall of great strength and height, entirely hidden from view by trees and climbing plants. Doors of entrance he detected in several places, but all carefully secured with bolts and bars, showing him but too plainly that, however gorgeous might be his prison, he was still a prisoner.

This minute scrutiny of the premises required some time, and he found, on his return to the pavilion, evident traces of stealthy visitants, who had disappeared after restoring the order he had found on the preceding evening, and which had been somewhat disturbed by his intrusion. The same watchful ingenuity was exercised in preparing his repasts, which, from their delicacy, might well have been supposed to emanate from fairy hands.

The novelty of his position served for a few hours to beguile impatience; but the solitude in which Reginald found himself gave him full leisure for meditation, and as hour after hour wore silently away, he formed a thousand different conjectures, and made as many varied resolutions to escape from his imprisonment by some means, however desperate.

The consciousness of being under perpetual surveillance, while those in whose power he was enthralled were at liberty, themselves unseen, to guard him with argus eyes, became more and more irksome. He determined that, if possible, another night and day should not pass before he had solved the mystery and claimed his release.

The shadows of evening lengthened across the verdant slope leading from the pavilion. The concert of birds gradually melted away on the ear, and twilight was fast approaching, as Reginald, lost in deep thought, slowly paced

the fragrant and embowering walks. The moon, bright and full, rose in cloudless splendour, throwing a silver mantle over the lovely scene before him. But it had lost whatever charm it might have possessed in his eyes, and his thoughts were solely occupied with the means of escape.

He was busy revolving a thousand plans presented by his imagination, when his attention was arrested by the light sound of a guitar, struck by the hand of no unskilful artist. The chords trembled in the summer air, and came with something more than musical cadence to his ear, for they broke the painful solitude around him, and seemed by their gentle tones to give a promise of his fondest wish.

He approached with silence and caution the spot from which these pleasing sounds emanated, and perceived, at the entrance of a bower of clustering myrtle and roses, the white-robed maiden to whom he had been indebted for his release from his gloomy prison-house. Venturing still unseen within a short distance, he had an opportunity of observing her, without creating any alarm.

There was a soft and pensive shade on her beautiful features, and her bosom heaved with a gentle sigh as she swept her hand over the strings, and in a plaintive voice sang a few stanzas in Spanish, of the ancient Moorish ballad, "*La peña de los enamorados*."

Her heart seemed in full unison with the words, as she breathed forth in softest melody the vows of the unfortunate lovers. The strain rose fuller and higher, as she pictured their stern resolve to perish together; but as she approached the final catastrophe, her voice faltered—she seemed to shrink from the precipice and the foaming flood below in which they were engulfed,—and throwing the instrument from her, covered her face with her hands.

There was a world of romance in this simple gesture. It told a tale of hopeless love, or at least of something in the history of the lovely being before him, resembling that of one whom her plaintive song commemorated.

"Here, then, is another prisoner," said Reginald; "the song of the captive betrays her! The poor bird flutters wildly against the wires of her gilded cage. I may hope for sympathy here, and perhaps for what would be far better, deliverance from my captivity."

He approached the bower with less reserve, and the Moorish maiden, startled by his footstep, raised her bright eyes toward him. As he advanced she rose, but manifested no alarm at his presence. On the contrary, she seemed prepared

for the graceful salutation with which he came forward, and returned it with equal courtesy in the Spanish tongue, in which he addressed her.

"That strain is sad, but its silvery chords were welcome," said Reginald. "I may say in truth, that no music ever fell on my ear in so sweet a cadence."

A slight smile for an instant brightened the dark eyes of the maiden, as she replied "I can well suppose that my poor song may have imparted pleasure, though unworthy in itself, since the imprisoned eagle might listen joyously to the chirp of the linnet, whose notes gave hope of his restoration to freedom. Yet I came hither not to beguile the solitude of a captive, but to express my regret at the necessity of having deprived him of liberty for so many hours, and to tell him that he is once more free."

"Thanks, gentle maiden," said Reginald, assuming her own style, "for the welcome information you bring me, as well as for all the courtesy I have received from hands so fair; but I fear the privilege will be of but little avail, cast, as I am, a stranger upon a foreign and hostile shore."

"It is not our wont," said the maiden, raising her beautiful head with the dignity and pride of a princess, "to offer gifts that are not only worthless in themselves, but a dishonour to the donor. No! your safety will be amply secured, though you may dream of nought but treachery and assassination. Unhappily these suspicions are too well justified by the past!" she added with a heavy sigh.

Notwithstanding his impatience to avail himself of the freedom thus offered, a deep interest was awakened in the mind of Reginald by the sentiments he had just heard, and the lofty tone in which they were expressed.

"Pardon me," he said, as the colour rose to his cheek, "if I have indulged suspicions of one so noble and so fair; but the circumstances in which I have been placed may best plead my excuse."

"I know them but too well," replied the maiden, hastily, "nor should I feel wounded at the feeling they naturally elicit. Yet, separated as I am from the world, and in ignorance of the evils and of the terrors that come to the very gates of this my fair prison-house, I sometimes forget the degradation of one to whom I am bound by fraternal ties, and think that, alone and friendless as we are, something of virtue and high feeling may be left to us,—but alas!"—her voice faltered, and a bright tear glistened through her long dark lashes.

"It would be but a waste of moments too precious to be idly squandered," she continued, "to explain all the circumstances that seem to you mysterious in your detention here. Your arrival was made known to me by him whom you had deeply offended. His sudden departure, though his erratic movements never excite any surprise, left me at liberty to follow the dictates of my own feelings, and without hesitating a moment, I determined on your liberation. The rest you know—farther it becomes not me to relate, nor you to inquire."

"Yet permit me one word more, beautiful maiden," said Reginald, "before we part, and it may be for ever;—why is it that one, gifted with a heart and mind of such rare excellence, should be content with such a lot? Have you no fears of serpents concealed beneath these lovely flowers that surround you, and that your fairy palace may, by some fatal cause less wonderful than magic, be converted into a dark and dreary prison-house?"

The maiden shuddered. "Fears I have none," she replied. "Had I indulged in weakness, you would still have been a captive. But there are reasons why I must be content with my lot. I cannot, without treachery, abandon one who, whatever may be his errors, you might say his crimes, has been my only protector. For me he has created this oasis in the desert, to recall the remembrance of our loved and lamented Grenada, beautiful land of our forefathers! For my sake, though against all my fervent remonstrances, he braves the perils of the deep, nor can the clearer light, that has dawned on my mind, avail to arrest the war he believes himself justified in waging on his brethren of other lands. His resentment I could bear, for I felt it in its extremity when I forsook the faith of our ancestors,—but I will neither forsake nor betray him. The day is approaching when he may bitterly rue the past. Even now threatening armaments beleaguer our shores. Brave as he is, he may yet, like Abdallah of old, weep as a woman for what he cannot defend as a man. I know not your country, nor whether you are among our enemies, but if you ever have the power I now possess, employ it as I have done, and by this token forget not—Zulema!"

As she spoke she disengaged a richly embroidered scarf from her waist, and gracefully threw it towards him. Even Constance would have approved the fervour and respect with which he caught the talismanic gift, and pressed it to his heart.] Satisfied with this mute acknowledgment of her

request, the maiden touched her lips with her finger as if to interdict farther communication, and approaching the door of entrance near which they now stood, clapped her hands.

At the signal its portals flew open, and Reginald saw a Moor holding by their bridles two Arab horses richly caparisoned. One parting glance he threw on the beautiful maiden. A gentle wave of her hand spoke as expressively as words could have done, and in another instant she had disappeared.

Reginald sprung lightly on the impatient courser, and following his guide down the rocky and precipitous descent, soon found himself sweeping with the wind over the sandy plain leading to the beach. The same silence and celerity that had marked his landing, attended his entrance into a Moorish galley anchored near the shore.

The dark outline of a frigate, from whose mast was floating the broad white flag of France, soon rose on his view ; nor could he be blamed for his acquiescence in the *ruse* employed by the Moorish galley for venturing to approach her. It may suffice to say that in a few hours he was safely sheltered beneath her protecting care.

CHAPTER XXX.

A TORNADO.

THE freshness of spring had passed away, and the summer heats began to warn the inhabitants of the metropolis that health and comfort equally demanded a cooler and more pleasant atmosphere than that found within its walls.

The court retired to the shades of their beautiful residence at St. Cloud, and the Count and Countess of Castellamare had returned to their kingdom, and resumed their legal titles.

There was still some verdure in the gardens, but the trees of the Champs Elysées, in the long intervals of the summer showers, looked like the powdered beauties of the court of Louis Quinze, and as if sheltering their waning charms beneath a disguise that gave to each individual the same physiognomy, the dust and the powder hiding alike the freshness of youth and the lines of age, and concealing the approaches of autumnal grey.

Constance listened to the monotonous song of the merlin

beneath her window, accompanied by the plash of the fountain. She thought of the full choir of birds in the groves of her old home, where she had rambled in perfect liberty, and she sighed for the privileges she had there enjoyed. The inhabitants of the city, as well as the temporary sojourners in it, were forming plans of release from its confinement, the natives retiring to their châteaux in the country, the strangers dispersing to fashionable watering-places,—to Dieppe, then patronized by the court,—to Boulogne,—to Baden Baden,—or to the still cooler regions of the Pyrenees or the Alps.

Beatrice and Constance often met to discuss plans which they had laid for passing several weeks together, during the heat of the season, at some eligible retreat, not doubting their influence in persuading older and wiser people, on whom they relied for the execution of their agreeable projects, to enter into their views and wishes.

They were sitting together one morning, when the day was in early freshness. A shower of the preceding night had cooled the air, and the light clouds, still partially obscuring the sun, gave them promise of a few hours' respite from the heat, which had become oppressive.

Beatrice was engaged in sketching a portrait of her friend, and both were silent, Constance endeavouring to obey her injunctions to remain perfectly quiet, until certain touches about the eyes and lips should complete the resemblance of the picture. The pencil moved rapidly for a moment, then paused, then went on again,—the touches were rubbed out and recommenced.

"Ah, Constance!" she exclaimed, "I should have as much success in painting the rainbow that we admired together last evening after the shower. I shall never succeed in taking your portrait, for your eyes and lips change every moment. But indeed it is not my fault, for you saw the likeness I made of my father, and you pronounced it perfect."

"I hope you do not despair yet," said Constance, smiling, "though I have been told that my face is as full of changes as an April morning. Try again: I will sit as still as a little mouse."

"It is not that," replied Beatrice; "I have no fault to find with your patience, which I confess has been most exemplary under the trial to which I subject it; but you cannot prevent your thoughts from giving a constantly varying expression to your face. I felt particularly anxious to succeed in this *portrait*, for I intended to be very generous. I should not *have kept it for myself*. There!" she exclaimed, hastily

resuming her brush, "what a lovely colour mounted to your cheeks at that moment! 'I must catch that tint before it vanishes.'"

The work went on diligently for a few moments; but the rose tint that had attracted her attention subsided, and Beatrice paused and pondered over a little dimple in the corner of the lip.

"I have chased that dimple from corner to corner," she said, "and it actually plays at hide and seek with me. I shall never catch it; the friend for whom I designed my portrait will be disappointed at last."

"It will not be a great disappointment, I imagine," said Constance, "for I think I have no friends here out of my own family, with whom I am sufficiently acquainted, to hope that my portrait would have special value in their eyes."

"Ah, Innocence!" returned Beatrice with an arch smile. "But you have a friend elsewhere who would be too happy to be put in possession of such a treasure. There is my rose tint again!" And again she plied her brush rapidly on the picture.

"I believe I must rest satisfied with my sitting of this morning," she continued, laying the brush down, "for I shall certainly spoil my work if I add another touch after the momentary inspiration I had just now. I really feel anxious for the success of my portrait, for I know how much it will be valued."

"You have not yet told me for whom you design it," said Constance, blushing deeply, while her eyes were cast down beneath the arch glance of her friend.

"No, that is my secret," replied Beatrice, laughing. "But do you know that I shall soon have the pleasure of presenting the happy owner to you? Letters from Milan inform us that he will soon be here."

"Letters from Milan, doubtless, bring tidings of a dear friend," said Constance, with an arch glance on her part, and it was now the turn of Beatrice to blush. "But I should not think he would feel much interest in the portrait of a person he had never seen."

"I must then be more explicit," returned Beatrice, "since you will not understand my allusion to one for whom I must ever entertain sentiments of the highest esteem. I can never think of that dreadful adventure I have so often mentioned to you, without shuddering, nor of my deliverer, without an emotion of enthusiastic gratitude. I rejoice to learn that he will be here soon, and that I shall have an opportunity o

expressing the thanks he was too modest to receive at the happy moment that succeeded those terrible events.

"But I must now leave you," she continued, "for my poor aunt is unusually nervous to-day; and as my father went to Versailles this morning to pass the day with a friend there, I cannot long be absent from her."

She gathered up her brushes, and, disposing of the unfinished portrait on the easel in a corner of the room, kissed the cheek of her friend, and retired to her own apartments.

Left to herself, Constance was soon absorbed in a pleasing reverie. Reginald was then about to return, and the painful mystery, that had darkened the last day they had met and parted so unsatisfactorily, would at length be dissipated. He would find that his impressions were groundless, and then——

But the thoughts of what might be the consequence of the anticipated explanation were banished by the reappearance of her friend. Beatrice had been absent not more than half an hour, when she came hastily back again.

Constance rose to assist her, as she supposed, in finding something that she had left, when she was shocked to perceive that Beatrice was mortally pale, and trembling with agitation so great that she seemed near fainting.

"Oh, Constance!" she exclaimed. "If you had seen him, —it was terrible!"

"Seen whom?" said Constance, greatly alarmed, and dreading the revelation of some fatal accident.

"It is not what you suppose," said Beatrice, divining the thought of her friend, and recovering some degree of composure. "Nothing has happened. But on my return just now I found Victor, who seems to me like a person out of his senses. He spoke in the wildest, the most incoherent manner of 'dark mysteries'—'a coming revolution'—'plans for assassinating the Duke of Orleans,'—and ended at last by putting this letter into my hand and bidding me bring it instantly to your father, and to request him to take it without a moment's delay to the duchess, who is now at her château at Neuilly. Victor then, raving like an insane person, left the house."

"It is most unfortunate, dear Beatrice," said Constance, "that my father, as well as yours, left the city to-day for a visit to a friend in the country, and he will not return before the evening. Can we not send the letter by a messenger?"

"No," replied Beatrice, "Victor charged me not to entrust it to a servant, and I am at a loss how to proceed."

Their conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door. Constance rose to open it, and found Antoine, who asked permission to speak to her father. He seemed perplexed and uncertain what to say, on learning that Mr. Melville was absent and would not return before the evening, and evidently hesitated to speak on the subject he came to communicate, before a stranger, as Beatrice was to him.

At length he said: "There is no time to be lost, and I must speak. I came to entreat you to let me see your father, that I might give him this letter, and beg him to deliver it to the Duchess of Orleans herself."

"This is a strange coincidence, Beatrice," said Constance. "These letters seem to be of vital importance, and they ought to be sent without delay. Can you not take them yourself, Antoine?" she added, turning to him. "You would be the most trusty messenger I know."

"I would take the letters with all my heart," replied Antoine, "but what chance would a poor fellow like me have to make the porter deliver them as soon as they are received? They would pass for some importunate petitions for money or assistance, among thousands left for the duke every day, and might not be read until to-morrow, if read at all. And to-morrow! Oh, my dear young lady! for God's sake find some messenger who will put this letter that I bring into the hands of the duke or his noble duchess before that to-morrow comes, for you know not what it may bring forth!"

His agitation was so great that he trembled and turned pale as he spoke.

"I will consult with my mother," said Constance; "she may perhaps direct us in this matter, which you seem to consider so important."

Mrs. Melville was indisposed, and had not left her room that morning. Constance went softly to her bedside, and opened the curtains.

"You need not be afraid of disturbing me, my child," said Mrs. Melville, observing that her daughter hesitated to speak. "I was about to rise, for I think I should be more comfortable. But what is the matter? you seem to be agitated."

"Nothing is the matter with me, dear mamma," replied Constance, "but here is a very singular coincidence with regard to these two letters I hold in my hand, both of them addressed to the Duchess of Orleans, with a request to papa

to deliver them in person. As he is not here, and will not return from the country until the evening, I did not know what answer to make; I cannot imagine what the letters contain, but they must be of great consequence, since they come from different quarters with the same earnest entreaties that they may be delivered without a moment's delay. Beatrice brought one, which she says was left by her cousin, M. Victor Delorme. The other Antoine brought; and all the persons I have seen connected with these mysterious letters seem to be agitated and alarmed."

"The delivery of the letters is simple enough," said Mrs. Melville, "and involves only an agreeable drive through the avenue of Neuilly, which we take every day, though it does not extend exactly to the château. If I were well enough I should accompany you; but my protection is not necessary for a morning drive. Under the circumstances, the duchess will not think it *entreprenante* if you and your young friend, with little Alice, take an airing together, and extend your drive as far as the château, where you can deliver the letters in person."

Constance immediately returned with this proposition. Antoine made his best bow, and with many thanks retired.

"I should be delighted to accompany you," said Beatrice, "but my aunt really needs my society this morning, and I have promised to pass the next two hours in reading to her. I do not think you will be tempted to prolong your drive farther than the Château de Neuilly, for it will probably be very warm after the effect of yesterday's shower is past,"—and again she took her leave.

Constance, with little Alice as her companion, was soon prepared for her mission, which the amiable simplicity of manners, that distinguished the noble family of Orleans, divested of any appearance of singularity; and without trepidation she proceeded on the excursion in which she daily accompanied her mother in their drives through the Avenue de Neuilly, leading directly to the duke's residence.

The carriage stopped at the porter's lodge, and the servant inquired if the duchess received. The porter pointed to several persons walking in the grounds. "At this hour," he said, "the family are generally taking their morning walk. If the young lady pleases, she can join them."

Constance alighted, and, leaving the carriage at the lodge, walked through the gateway and entered the grounds. She approached the duchess, who received her with graceful cour-

tesy, and presented the letters, mentioning at the same time the circumstances under which she had undertaken to deliver them, as an apology for a visit that might otherwise have seemed presuming.

The duchess took the letters with a kindly smile, assuring Constance that she was happy to have so charming a messenger. But, on casting her eyes over one of the letters, she turned deadly pale, and sunk on a seat, which was happily near her.

"My child!" she exclaimed, "Who gave you these letters?"

"One of them was given me by the Signorina Beatrice de Visconti," replied Constance, "and she informed me that her kinsman, M. Victor Delorme, requested it to be sent to your highness without delay."

The duchess broke the seal of the other letter. Her agitation increased. "And this one," she exclaimed, glancing over it, with occasional expressions of terror, "Where did it come from?"

"That one was given me by a very humble person," replied Constance, "only a poor Swiss gardener."

"Do you know anything of the character of this person?" inquired the duchess, anxiously.

"I believe him to be honest and faithful," replied Constance. "We have found him so, during the brief period of our residence here."

"Then receive my best thanks, my dear child," said the duchess, "and hasten back to your father's protection without losing a moment, for there is a lion in your path. God bless you—Adieu!"

She rose and walked hastily to the house. Constance returned to the carriage that awaited her without, musing on the strange agitation caused by the letters, which seemed to reveal a secret so terrible both to the writers and to the receiver.

As Beatrice had predicted, the day began to lose the temporary freshness imparted to it by the shower of the preceding evening, and the sun became too warm to render a drive farther than the château pleasant. She therefore simply gave the order to return home, and beguiled the way with the playful prattle of little Alice.

"How I love to see those soldiers, and to hear the bands of music!" exclaimed Alice, as they passed the *Barrière de l'Etoile* on their way back. "Only see, sister, what a number of troops!"

Constance looked, and found, as she had said, that the avenue was filling with troops of the line marching in detached regiments.

"Yes," she replied, "you may find them amusing to you, but our horses do not find them so to them: see how restless they are! I am glad to see that Eugène is about to turn out of the Champs Elysées, for it might be dangerous for us to pass by all those troops."

As she spoke, the coachman turned out of the avenue into a side street leading though the Faubourg St. Honoré, and drove rapidly to the Rue Royale. A sudden halt, and a vehement exclamation from the servant, awakened her curiosity, and drawing up the silk curtain that had screened her from the sun, Constance perceived that the carriage was surrounded by a crowd of men, some in *blouses*, some better dressed, but all evidently under the influence of strong excitement, and talking rapidly and earnestly together. Two of these men had seized the reins of the horses on either side.

"Parbleu!" exclaimed one of these men, in reply to the angry expostulation of the coachman, "you cannot pass here! What ill wind blew you to this place;—why did you not go by the Champs Elysées?"

"Because the avenue was full of troops," said the footman, deprecatingly. "It was impossible."

"Impossible!—well, diable!" it is impossible here, too,—so begone!"

The carriage was now surrounded on every side by the crowd, increasing constantly in numbers and density. Constance, terrified at the violence of the altercation, knew not what course to take. Her alarm was somewhat abated by perceiving the honest countenance of Antoine in the throng. He was forcing his way through it, and approached the chariot window, from which she was looking out on the gathering multitude.

"Do not be terrified, dear young lady," he said in a low voice. "These people will not molest you, if you retain your self-possession and do not show too much fear of them. But you will be compelled to leave the carriage, for it can neither retreat nor go forward."

At the moment he spoke, the sharp, ringing sound of an axe struck her ear, and Constance saw that two men were busily engaged in cutting down one of the fine trees that shaded the street. It fell with a tremendous crash behind the carriage. A barricade made of the large square paving-stones with which the street had been laid, and hastily torn for the purpose, was rapidly rising in front of it,

Antoine assisted the trembling Constance and her little companion to descend from the chariot.

"Courage!" he said to her, still speaking in a low voice, "there is help at hand!—one who will guard you better than I can. Let the young lady pass!" he said in an authoritative tone to the people nearest him. "Give the servants their horses: they have nothing to do with this affair. Let the young lady pass, and I will take care of the child."

A few persons in the crowd nearest him seemed disposed to obey the order. It was given boldly, and, whether he had authority or not, in the confusion of the moment it was not contradicted. The coachman and footman were dismissed with the horses, and Antoine took the weeping Alice in his arms. Constance, summoning all her strength, followed him a few steps, but the crowd continued to press around her. Every avenue of escape seemed rapidly closing, when a man forced his way through the throng, and approached the spot where she was standing almost petrified with terror. A glance sufficed to reassure her,—a protector was at hand.

"Oh, Reginald!" she exclaimed, forgetting all form or ceremony in her alarm, nor once thinking of the thrill those two simple familiar words sent to his heart, "you will protect me!"

"With my life!" he answered, fervently, as she clung to his arm.

Antoine, believing his loved benefactress safe with such a protector, speedily threaded his way through the busy multitude with Alice in his arms. Reginald and Constance followed, until the crowd pressed between them. The sharp, ringing sound of the axes still continued, and a moment after they had left the spot, another of the fine elms fell crashing across the street, and embracing in its fall the handsome vehicle, now only a confused mass of crushed and glittering fragments. Constance shuddered, and pressed closer to the protecting arm.

"Whither so fast, young sir?" said a man in the crowd to Reginald. "We suffer no idlers nor loungers here. What are you doing among us?"

"I have nothing to do with your affairs," replied Reginald. "Let us pass!" and he endeavoured to force his way forward.

"*Parbleu!* not till you give some account of yourself," said the man; "for though you seem to be a foreigner, you may be a royalist too. As for the young lady, she carries the Bourbon lilies in her face," he added, looking at the pale cheeks of Constance. "Come, young man, tell me on your-

honour,—are you republican or royalist? Answer me truly."

"Republican," said Reginald, boldly, though feeling never less disposed than at a moment when he saw a republic in such hands, to acknowledge his own political allegiance.

"Indeed!" said his persecutor, still barring the way, "where, then, is the tri-colour? Why do you not wear it?" And he pointed to the tri-coloured cockade in his rusty hat, and another in his button-hole. "Where is the tri-colour, I say?"

A thought flashed across Reginald's mind. He put his hand on his breast,—“in my heart,” he replied. The bon-mot acted like a charm.

"Bravo! Bravo!" was repeated on all sides among the crowd, which opened right and left to permit Reginald a passage through their ranks with his companion.

They lost not a moment in availing themselves of it, and walked on as rapidly as the tremor of Constance would allow. A few half-whispered words of assurance from Reginald alone broke the silence. They traversed the Place Louis Quinze and the garden of the Tuileries, crossed the bridge, and entered the street leading to Mr. Melville's residence in the Faubourg St. Germain.

As they advanced, a crowd of men, rapidly increasing in numbers, arrested their farther progress.

"Whither so fast, pretty one?" said their leader, boldly, to Constance, who drew her veil over her face to avoid the unpleasant gaze. "All who pass here give an account of themselves," he continued, turning towards Reginald.

But the moment his eye rested on Reginald, an expression of the deadliest hatred passed over his face,—the livid hue of rage blanched his lips, and his eyes glittered with basilisk ferocity.

"*Sacre! Traître!*" he exclaimed, through his clenched teeth, rolling the words as none but an infuriated Gaul can do, "I bade you beware, when we met and parted at Sens. The hour of vengeance is come! You shall feel what it is to be deprived of what you most value!"

He drew a pistol from beneath his mantle, where it had been concealed, and levelled it at Constance.

Without a moment's hesitation, Reginald threw himself between the assassin and the defenceless girl. His attempt to snatch the weapon was vain;—it was discharged, and the ball entered his side. Reginald staggered back a few paces, and a grim smile passed over the features of Dubourg.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Constance, with a shriek of agony, and wringing her hands in despair,—“Reginald! you are murdered!—and for me!”

But the “avenger of blood” was at hand. At that instant a troop of the royal guard rode furiously down the street, charging on all the groups they met with. They had been fired on by the populace, and were doubly irritated by opposition. The gallant young horsemen swept by Reginald and Constance, now separated from the throng, and spurred on toward the place where the multitude had turned and stood at bay.

Their leader, Dubourg, infuriated by his recent encounter, forgot every precaution, and encouraged his followers to stand their ground. The cavalry charged on them, and they were swept away like chaff before the wind. The glittering sword of a young horseman dealt justice upon the assassin. His keen blade reached the fertile brain that had so often been exercised in evil,—the guilty hand was powerless,—the feet that had been “swift to shed blood” availed no longer to escape well-merited vengeance. Dubourg fell on that spot, and the whole troop charged over his lifeless body.

The scene passed like a swift and terrible vision, leaving the street blank and deserted. Not a living being was in sight, and every house was barred and bolted.

Send help to these desolate ones, oh, Heaven, for there is none now for them in any “child of man!”

Reginald pressed his hand on his wounded side. “I have strength enough left,” he said, “to reach your house. Do not be so much alarmed—I am wounded, but not so fatally as you imagine.”

Constance passed her trembling arm through his, and he walked on firmly for a few steps. They drew near her father’s door; she felt that he tottered; his cheek grew paler and paler.

The door of the *porte cochère* opened, and Reginald fell bleeding and insensible into the arms of the faithful Antoine.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BRILLIANT DESTINY.

THE remembrance of the revolution of the *trois journées* which swept like a tornado over the French capital, has

been, since that epoch, almost obliterated by other and equally terrible days and events. The calm which had hushed the raging elements of strife into an ominous stillness before the tremendous storm bursts forth, the brilliant fêtes of the court which immediately preceded it,—proving as they did the unsuspecting security of the sovereign and his ministers,—gave it a more electrical and startling effect. Had a thunderbolt from a clear sky fallen at their feet, it could not have astonished them more.

Three brief sentences, announcing as they did the beginning of the revolution to General Lafayette, who was at that moment in quiet seclusion at his château of Lagrange, will explain the causes which set fire to the train secretly prepared for many months, if not years, before the explosion.

The suspicions which the friends of the court naturally pointed against the avowed champion of republican government, as the author and immediate instigator of those troubles, were unfounded. A day only had elapsed since the invitation of the king to attend the meeting of the Chamber of Deputies, couched in the ancient style of royal condescension, and beginning with "Très chère et bien aimé," had been received and read by him to a circle of his family and friends while seated around the dinner table.

But the smile called forth by the affectionate greeting of the king, was soon chased away by the appearance of another missive of a very different character, containing only the three brief sentences alluded to above. The sentences referred to were—

"The Chamber of Deputies is dissolved ;

"The law of elections changed ;

"The liberty of the press is suspended."

These words, read by General Lafayette with solemn emphasis in the midst of a circle composed of his own family and numerous visitors, who had availed themselves of the hospitality of Lagrange to escape from the unusual heat of the city to the refuge of its cooler shades, had the effect of a pistol-shot on the eager listeners. Ladies burst into tears and lamentations, predicting that such arbitrary measures would lead to a bloody resistance,—men knitted their brows and consulted apart in separate groups, or walked on the lawn in earnest conversation. Before the end of the following day the party dispersed, and their venerable host was on his way to the metropolis,—whether to pour oil upon the waves that were already dashing with merciless fury over the devoted court and ministry, or to encourage uncompro-

missing resistance to the measures they had attempted to carry into execution, was hardly yet determined in his own breast.

To the exercise of an infatuated temper, without corresponding force of will and character, may be attributed the unhappy termination of the reign of Charles X. Since that epoch it has been seen that far more arbitrary measures than he ever attempted have been triumphantly carried out with hardly a show of resistance; but these arbitrary measures have been cautiously and gradually planned, and executed under the mighty protection of half a million of bayonets. In the *trois journées* the bayonets were either sullenly withdrawn or turned against the breast of the sovereign. In vain did the Dauphin, enraged against the Duke de Raguse, the commander of the army, reproach him as the "traitor Marmont," and snatch the knightly sword from him, deeply wounding his own hand, as he seized the weapon by the blade in his haste to deprive the duke of his command. In vain the alarmed sovereign proposed terms of pacification to the insurgents, and abdicated his throne in favour of his youthful grandson Henry V. The fiat had gone forth; and only a precipitate flight was left for the king and his family, with the few friends who adhered to his fallen fortunes.

The events of the revolution of the three days in Paris filled so large a space in the public mind and the public journals of the time, that it would be presumptuous to record them in such pages as these. It would be a superfluous, as well as a hopeless, task to endeavour to give any adequate idea of the frightful confusion that reigned throughout the capital in that period of anarchy—of the sanguinary conflicts between inhabitants of the same city,—brethren of the same lovely, but distracted, country.

Even to those withdrawn from the sight of warriors with "garments rolled in blood," of heaps of slain and wounded, among which women and helpless babes, accidentally killed by the maddened combatants, were seen,—even to those who did not personally witness these horrors, the sounds of the tocsin and alarm-bells, intermingled with the booming of cannon, the answering peals of musketry, and the cries of the infuriated multitudes, as they met in mortal shock, were enough to elicit feelings of the deepest anxiety as well as commiseration for the victims of this unnatural strife.

Where was Victor Delorme during this period of con-

fusion, of anarchy, of bloody conflict? Lured on by the *ignis fatuus* of his destiny, still cheated by the hope that some brilliant prize awaited him, he rushed madly on. Exhorting, encouraging, leading on his followers to every attack, foremost among the most intrepid, he exposed himself to every danger, and seemed to possess a charmed life.

But at the head of the last storming party, in the battle that carried the palace of the Tuileries and gave the insurgents their final triumph, Victor encountered the unyielding resistance of desperation.

Three hundred of the Swiss guards had turned to bay within the palace, faithful to the sovereign to whom they had sworn fidelity. Superhuman courage could not avail to save these unfortunate men from the fearful odds brought against them, and they fell, fighting to the last in the cause which they had espoused as their own—

But not unavenged. Many a brave youth, trusting in his own strong arm, and in the encouraging voice of his enthusiastic commander, met his death-blow from the stronger and more practised arm of a Swiss guardsman. Victor himself, as he and his companions rushed like a whirlwind through the portals of the Tuileries, received a thrust from a bayonet that pressed him backward into their arms. He raised his sword on high, with a cry of "Victory!"—but the next moment that arm fell powerless by his side.

The battle was won,—the last conflict over, and the tri-coloured flag floated above the dome of the palace, and was streaming from every height. The lilies of France, soiled and blood-stained, were trampled beneath the feet of the conquerors.

Victor was borne in triumph in the arms of his companions into the palace of the Tuileries. There were still the splendid apartments, rich with costly furniture and artistic decorations, where kings and princes in regal pomp had so lately moved in careless ease and luxury. There stood the throne, empty and but a name,—the sovereign who had so lately filled it surrounded by obsequious courtiers, now an exile and a wanderer, "with none so poor to do him reverence."

Victor, still borne in the arms of his companions and followers, was brought near the emblazoned seat of majesty.

"Place him on the throne!" they exclaimed. "It is the only seat worthy of one so noble! If he lives, we will sustain him; if he dies, it is an honour that his bravery well deserves to die on the throne of France!"

"Not there! not there!" exclaimed Victor, with a shudder as they ascended the steps of the throne. "Oh, do not mock me so cruelly in this last hour of my existence!"

But they heeded not the supplication, and intent on their own wish of rendering to their brave leader what they deemed the highest mark of their admiration of his valour, persisted in seating him on the throne.

His eager companions supported him on either side, but the warm life-blood was ebbing fast from the deep wound in his breast. For a moment Victor raised his drooping head, and unclosed his eyes—they were heavy and glazed. He looked around him, and a strong shudder passed over his frame.

"This, then, is the fulfilment of the brilliant destiny that has lured me on to a bloody death!" he murmured. "Oh, Beatrice!"

His head sunk again. "Mother!" he murmured. "Forgive"—"oh God!"

A slight convulsion followed the last half-articulated words, and the spirit had passed from time to eternity.

Victor Delorme lies buried beneath the monument that marks the spot where "the victims" of the revolution were interred. The stranger who pauses to meditate on that spot, while examining the richly sculptured façade of the Louvre on the one hand, or the ancient church of St. Germain l'Auxerrois on the other, naturally recurs to the period when the courts of the former echoed in low murmurs the sanguinary order for the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the bell of the latter pealed forth the dire signal for its execution. His thoughts are not with the brief career, and briefer termination of the lives, of nameless heroes, but with the mighty dead whose names, either for good or evil, have filled the pages of history.

Victor Delorme was buried near the spot where he had received his mortal wound.

There was one fair hand to hang a garland of *immortelles* over his early grave. Bright eyes rained pious tears to the memory of one beautiful and gifted as herself, but led astray by the restless demon of ambition,—lured on by false theories and a fancied *destiny*.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN EXPLANATION.

WHEN Reginald awoke to consciousness, after the long insensibility caused by the wound he had received from the hand of the assassin,—having thus fulfilled almost literally his promise to Constance to protect her “with his life” from the dangers that surrounded her,—he found himself beneath the hospitable roof of Mr. Melville, and watched over with all the tender solicitude that his generous devotion had naturally awakened.

But the revolutionary tempest that was raging with such pitiless fury up to the very portals of the hotel, within whose walls he had found a shelter and a home, rendered every effort unavailing to procure the proper surgical assistance at the moment it was needed; and when this difficulty was at length removed, it was impossible to arrest the fever that succeeded the extraction of the ball which had so nearly been a messenger of death.

For many days life fluttered feebly through his veins, and his wandering senses imperfectly, and at long intervals, recalled the event that had reduced him to his present alarming condition. Youth and a strong constitution at length triumphed; and the crisis was announced by a sleep so profound that, as his bloodless cheek lay on the pillow and his hand on the couch, hardly distinguishable from the white linen on which they rested, Mrs. Melville, who had been watching for this favourable indication of returning health, listened anxiously for his breathing to assure herself that he was still indeed a living being. That breath came slowly and softly, but he *did* breathe, and she resumed her quiet station by his side, after noiselessly gliding from the room for a moment to request that the utmost stillness should be maintained in the house, to prevent the dangers that might arise from suddenly awakening the patient.

For many hours Reginald remained in this calm and deathlike repose, his heavy eyelids only half veiling his eyes. The door was left open to admit a fresher current of air; and at that door, though carefully screened from view, and in profound silence, sat another anxious listener.

A sigh from the sleeper deepened the solicitude of the fair sentinel, and, forgetting her precaution for an instant, she stood at the open door. What vision, passing through

his dreamy thoughts, awakened the smile of quiet happiness which flitted over his pale features at that moment? A seraph seemed watching over him, and the angel form, though of earth, was mingled in that dream with thoughts and hopes of heaven.

Can any joy equal that with which the loved one, who had entered apparently into the dark valley of the shadow of death, and has been rescued by the arm of the All-powerful, is welcomed back to the hearts that throbbed in breathless suspense until his return to life is assured? There is something so holy, so calm, and yet so rapturous in such happiness, that it may well be deemed a foretaste of the blessedness to come.

How speedily is the past forgotten, with all its attendant anguish of mind and body, when the invalid, dearer than ever for the dangers he has passed,—caressed and petted,—first considered in every arrangement, the first one thought of in the morning, the last at night,—his name on every lip and in every prayer,—when, after all this, he comes forth, pale and feeble, but wiser and better, stronger in faith and hope, and basking in the warm smiles that welcome his return to the friendly circle!

Reginald's convalescence, after the dangerous crisis had passed happily by, was sure, but slow. Several weeks had elapsed before he was allowed to try his strength so far as to leave his room; but at the end of that time he protested so earnestly against farther imprisonment, that a compromise with his careful though indulgent guardians was effected, and he was pronounced free, with the condition that he should not attempt to leave the house before another week should ensure his strength.

A comparative calm had succeeded the revolution of the three days; and only an angry murmur of the subsiding thunder was occasionally and at long intervals heard, but at a distance too great to excite farther apprehension of a return of the storm. The city, though quiet, wore a melancholy and deserted aspect, and the mountains, or the sea coast, would have been far more desirable at that season. But the condition of the entire continent was as yet too unsettled to admit the thought of any change of residence until governments and nations were established on a firmer foundation.

Reginald received every assurance, in answer to his anxious inquiries on the subject, that his involuntary sojourn with Mr. Melville's family interposed no obstacle to the intention they had formed of passing the remainder of the

summer in Switzerland, as the unexpected event of the revolution had settled that question ; and it must be confessed that he bore his protracted captivity with exemplary philosophy.

And was Reginald happy, perfectly happy ? It may naturally be supposed that his enjoyment was now unalloyed, and that his position was the very one he would have chosen above all others for the fulfilment of those hopes that were interwoven with his very existence. To be watched over with tender solicitude, day after day, by her to whom his heart was given,—to see her like a ministering angel anticipating every wish, exercising every faculty of her mind to make him forget that he was a prisoner ;—reading his favourite books, singing his favourite songs ; soothing him when sad, laughing with him when merry,—Ah Reginald ! such a position, if any uncertainty rested on its results, was a dangerous one indeed !

Was he then happy ? The answer will seem strange,—he was not. What mortal is ever contented, even when fortune smiles brightest, and is apparently lavishing her treasures with an unsparing hand ? One thought that passed through his mind constantly interrupted the sweet dream, in which he indulged so fondly. He was still in doubt with regard to the sentiments Constance entertained for him ; and the idea that she might suspect him of claiming her affections and her hand, as the reward of the sacrifice he had made for her, tinged his pale cheek with a blush of ingenuous shame. He longed for an explanation, and at the same time dreaded it, fearing that one word might dispel the beautiful air castle he had raised with so much care and hope.

Reginald's last week of imprisonment was nearly over, and had flown by so lightly on its downy pinions that he would not have marked the hours but for the recurrence of the thought that pained his generous heart. As the period of his stay as an inmate in Mr. Melville's family drew to a close, he became more restless and uncertain, unwilling as he was to exchange the dawn of hope for—it might be, the dark gloom of despair.

Beatrice came daily to inquire after the health of her "friend's friend," in which she naturally felt the kindest and deepest interest, and busied herself with amiable alacrity in contributing to his convalescence by alternate readings *with Constance*, by her music, and in the completion of the *portrait*, a fruitful source of interest and amusement to the

trio. She took particular pleasure in making her visits at moments when Mrs. Melville was engaged in some duty, and then, finding the parlour in which they always met, and which had hitherto served perfectly well for the purpose, too dark for a studio, or that she had left some favourite brush or colour behind, she would glide away, leaving Constance and Reginald alone,—always seeking afterwards an early opportunity of questioning her blushing friend as to the result of the conference, when they met the next morning.

But Constance had no "result" to record, for Reginald's lips were sealed by the fear of hearing the tame word "gratitude" from those of Constance, in reply to the fervent declaration of the passion that filled his heart.

"I am afraid your charming friend, the Signorina Visconti, finds me both stupid and ungrateful," said Reginald one morning, when Beatrice, after her usual visit, had found some plausible pretext for leaving the two alone. "I am compelled to confess that I have treasured up hardly a line, or even a sentiment, of the beautiful poetry she read just now in a voice of such musical pathos."

"I shall not find it difficult to defend you from both charges," said Constance, smiling. "You are hardly yet strong enough to listen to anything with undivided attention, and the idea of believing you 'ungrateful' would, I feel quite sure, never enter her mind. Beatrice and her friend have both too much cause for gratitude to you, to allow us to perceive any want of it on your part."

"Gratitude!" repeated Reginald impatiently—"the word of all others that I dreaded to hear from your lips. I would rather even hear that of *esteem*, ominous as it too often is."

"Gratitude and esteem?" said Constance interrogatively, while a bright blush suffused her cheek, and the fairy dimples played round her lip, "what possible harm can lurk in such beautiful words? Words which I cherish especially for your sake,—words which always remind me how deeply I am——"

"Do not finish the sentence, I entreat you," interposed Reginald. "I would not have you to be grateful to me."

"You would not have me grateful to you?" said Constance, the bright blush suffusing her cheek yet more deeply, while her eyes fell beneath the earnest expression of those which were looking into them with such a world of tenderness and devotion.

"No," replied Reginald, "I would not have you think for

an instant that I claim any feelings but those your heart will give me, freely and untrammelled by any sense of obligation. Tell me," he continued, in a tone of passionate fervour, "oh Constance! tell me if I had any place in that heart before this gratitude was awakened in it?"

In his earnestness he had taken her little hand in both of his, and his eyes beseechingly sought an answering glance from beneath the long lashes that rested on her blushing cheek. She was silent, and tears trembled on those lashes. But when her eyes met his, the question was answered. Words could not then have added one drop to the overflowing cup of Reginald's happiness.

"If I must not be grateful," said Constance, resuming her arch expression and playful manner, though she made no effort to withdraw her hand from his, "what can I say?"

"May I dictate, then?" said Reginald.

"Yes."

"And you will follow my dictation?"

"Yes," she repeated.

"Say then that you love me!" said Reginald, lowering his voice.

"Say then that you love me!" echoed Constance. "I have fulfilled the compact. Those are your own words, and your own dictation. Now I am sure you ought to be very, very happy, and very—grateful."

"Ah, no!" said Reginald. "I was mistaken in the words I intended you to repeat. Let me dictate once more. I love you!"

"Ah, that is more than I promised!" said Constance, laughing. "You must be satisfied with my first compliance. Trust me, you shall always have my esteem."

He smiled, and what a bright happy smile it was, as he kissed again and again the imprisoned hand, unchecked—unreproved. The formidable word had lost its chilling power.

"And my gratitude," she continued—"I shall always be most grate——"

But the word was only half spoken. How it came to be interrupted is a matter which does not in any way concern the readers or the writer of these pages. The latter must be content to say, and the former to learn, that all doubts were from that hour removed from the anxious mind of the young lover, and that his health and happiness were speedily, *and together*, restored and confirmed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BEAUTIFUL NUN.

TIME passed on. The *gouvernement provisoire* became first sickly and attenuated, then a mere walking skeleton, and ended one day, as such feeble bodies are wont to do, by giving up the ghost altogether, without even a struggle.

The Duke of Orleans succeeded as naturally and quietly to the throne of France as if the "right divine" had put him in possession of it, and as if no scion of the elder branch of the House of Bourbon still laid claim to the regal heritage and the loyalty of the *grande nation*.

The champion of republican liberty, and the supple adherent of eight different governments, gave their sanction at the same moment to the new régime. Lafayette and Talleyrand, though separated by the nominal but now almost invisible lines of the *droit et gauche*, together offered their allegiance.

"*Que faire ?*" said the former, as the friends of a republic murmured at the speedy demolition of their Utopian schemes, on which were built so many bright hopes of individual fortunes and honours. "*Que voulez vous ?* We have every attainable guarantee of freedom and good government in a popular throne surrounded by republican institutions. Is not this a most happy compromise of the difficulties of our position ?"

"*Un trône populaire, entouré des institutions républicaines !*" repeated the caustic and witty Talleyrand aside to one of the courtiers of the new king, with his usual piquancy and pointed satire. "*C'est un jambon entouré de persil. Il faut prendre le jambon, et mettre le persil de côté.*"

With this strange cement were parties united, *droit et gauche* concurring in the opinion that a regal government was the only one that could maintain any stability in France.

The new sovereign, with the emblems of royalty before him, took the solemn and impressive oath that inducted him into his perilous state ; and the multitudes assembled on the outside of the Chamber of Deputies, where the ceremony took place, surrounded the royal cortège, as it slowly traversed the quays and streets leading to the now kingly Palais Royal, with tumultuous and deafening cries of "*Vive le Roi ! Vive la Reine ! Vive la famille Royale !*"

Paris gives the ton to fashions and to revolutions. Many months had not elapsed after the occurrence of the events thus briefly recorded, when the capital was filled with illustrious fugitives from the vengeance that had overtaken the capricious use, or abuse, of despotic power. The convulsion which had shaken the nations of Europe to their foundation, extended to distant continents. The ex-dey of Algiers, whose dominions had just been converted by the thunders of French artillery on the African coast into a province of France, and the ex-emperor of Brazil, Don Pedro, might be seen amicably seated near each other at the opera or in the palaces. But, notwithstanding these and similar changes and chances, society and the gaieties of the city began to resume their reign, and the events of the *trois journées* seemed in a few months almost forgotten.

Forgotten, too, were the troubles and trials incident to and mingled with the events of those days. Reginald, restored to brilliant health and happiness, looked back with complacency rather than regret at the hours and days and weeks of his illness, and forward to the future with unalloyed hope and joy.

He was one day passing the streets that led from the *hôtel* in which he had taken his rooms, to the Faubourg St. Germain, in which distinguished quarter the reader will not be surprised to learn that he had received permission to pay daily visits of some length. Those visits had received the sanction of Mr. and Mrs. Melville, to whom a nearer view of his amiable deportment and noble character had given entire confidence in promising the hand of their lovely daughter to one they deemed so worthy of such a precious treasure.

As Reginald drew near the house, the door of a *porte cochère* just before him suddenly opened, and a person dressed in the garb of a sister of charity passed over the threshold. The heavy bronze door shut with a clang behind her, and for a moment she looked back as if uncertain whether to trust herself in the street.

Her eyes at that moment encountered the eyes of Reginald, which were turned upon her with interest and curiosity. There was something in the aspect of the *sœur de charité* that awakened both. Her features were noble and beautiful, though they were very pale, and her dark eyes and wan cheeks bore evident traces of recent sorrow. Whatever grace her form might have possessed was shrouded beneath the shapeless black robe and white *coiffe* of the nun. The large black rosary at her side, and the basket on her arm, an-

nounced the devotee to a life of penitence amid scenes of suffering.

As those dark eyes met his, a crowd of recollections rushed on Reginald's mind. They lighted up with an expression almost of beatitude, while she clasped her hands wildly and uttered an exclamation of joy.

Reginald felt that he could not be mistaken. Beneath this strange disguise he recognised the Moorish maiden Zulema.

She rang a hasty summons at the portal from which she had just stepped forth, and it was instantly opened. Reginald hesitated not for a moment to obey the silent signal she made him to follow her, and he entered the court. She led the way to a large and handsome apartment, where an elderly person, dressed in a garb similar to her own, was seated. The elder nun started as the novice appeared, followed by a handsome young man, and her heavy brows contracted over the severe eyes beneath them.

"Do not be offended, sister, that I have so hastily brought this young man into your presence," Zulema said in a low and timid voice. "He alone can avert the calamity that I most dread. Surely Heaven has sent him in this terrible moment. You know not," she said, turning to Reginald, "how anxiously I have sought for you. Oh, how many fevered days and sleepless nights have I passed since that anxious search began!"

"You cannot rejoice more sincerely than I do that your wish is at last accomplished," said Reginald, "as your earnest manner shows me that I may perhaps have it in my power to prove the gratitude and devotion with which your noble conduct inspired me, when I was a captive in your hands and at your mercy."

"Alas!" returned the Moorish maiden, shuddering at the recollection of the events that had transpired immediately after those to which he had alluded, "your prophetic warning has often since that time been remembered. Serpents lurked beneath those bright flowers,—the fairy palace was, as you foretold, converted into a dreary prison-house,—and he who had created that oasis in the desert for me, his loved sister, his Zulema—he is a prisoner, and condemned to die the ignominious death of a malefactor!"

She covered her face with her hands, and sobbed convulsively as she uttered the last words.

"And cannot this calamity be averted?" said Reginald, whose feelings were deeply interested in the distress of one so lovely, and to whom he felt bound, as he had just ex-

pressed to herself, by the strongest ties of gratitude and respect.

"There is one hope left," said the maiden, "one alone, and that rests on yourself. Yes! that life on which my own hangs, for I could not survive him, may perhaps be saved by you!"

"You will not wrong me by doubting my will, if I indeed possess such a power," said Reginald; "but may I not ask an explanation of words that seem to me so enigmatical!"

"Willingly, most willingly," she replied eagerly. "It is for this that I have sought you so anxiously. The persons who were taken prisoners at the same time that you were, enraged at their detention, have made false representations to the authorities here. These persons were soon liberated, and their property restored to them, as they admit. My poor brother merited not the opprobrious title of pirate. That of a privateer, which he claimed, has not so dire a signification, though justice and honour could sanction neither."

She paused, and cast down her eyes, as a blush of shame for a moment mantled her wan cheek, and then subsided, leaving it paler than before.

"The accusations they bring against him, so far as they concern themselves," she continued, "if substantiated, may consign him to imprisonment, for what length of time I know not, but they do not involve a terrible death. These false witnesses allege that one of the prisoners, and that one, from their account and description, is yourself, was foully murdered, after being separated from them and forced into a solitary prison. On this ground they seek to avenge their own wrongs, and his life is now in the utmost peril. Give your testimony in his favour, and he is saved!"

"It is but a simple act of justice to give that testimony," said Reginald, "and I trust you do not doubt for a moment that I will aid his cause to the best of my ability. I am only too happy to grant such a request. Put me in possession of all that relates to the accusation, and rely upon my zeal for the rest.

"And now, will it be presuming too far, fair Zulema, if I inquire why it is that I see you in this strange disguise?" continued Reginald, as he glanced at her heavy black dress, contrasting so painfully with his recollection of the snow-white robe he had seen fluttering in the bright moonlight, beneath the shades of citron and orange where he had first beheld her.

"It is no disguise," said the maiden with a sigh, while her

eyes were suffused with tears. "A life of penitence well befits one who would give more than that life, if it could atone for the errors of him she loves far more than herself."

"You cannot then trust to that atonement which has been made for sins of crimson dye?" said Reginald. "A life of suffering and privation is not needed from you, Zulema;—there is ONE on whom you may cast all your care."

"My resolve is made," she replied hastily, and pressing the cross of the rosary to her lips, while she traced the symbol in imaginary lines on her breast, as if to exorcise some forbidden thought within it; "I have not been taught thus by Father Anselmo. Do not seek to unsettle the convictions with which my newly inspired faith is interwoven."

"I do not seek to make a proselyte," returned Reginald; "I speak only the words of truth and soberness, and would have you reflect on the consequences of a step you may hereafter regret."

"Sister Agnes," interposed the dark-browed elder nun, who had comprehended the word "proselyte,"—the only one of their conversation that had intelligibly reached her ear, as it had been conducted in the Spanish tongue,—“Sister Agnes, time presses. The young stranger, if he is the one of whom you spoke to me, may be better employed in giving his testimony than in lingering here.”

"True, ah, too true!" said the maiden. "Farewell!—I need not direct you farther than to place these papers in your hands. Your own wisdom and judgment will guide you better in this fearful cause than I could."

She turned once more to look toward him, as the nun took her arm and silently led her away. There was a strange mixture of enthusiasm, doubt, and—was it some gentler feeling expressed in those dark, sad, lustrous eyes? The door closed, and Reginald read them no farther.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MEETING.

"Who is it!—who is it!" exclaimed little Alice, as Constance felt a pair of hands gently, but suddenly, passed over her eyes. "Now guess whose hands those are!" continued Alice, dancing around her sister in an ecstasy of delight.

Constance had been reading a new and entertaining book

which completely absorbed her thoughts. The evening came on unperceived, except from the influence of the approaching twilight. She had risen from her chair, and stood near a window to catch the last rays of the declining day, with her face averted from the door through which the person who had thus surprised her had entered.

"Who is it?" repeated Alice, with childish eagerness and glee.

"Reginald," said Constance, in a low voice, and with some hesitation; for this freedom, slight as it was, did not exactly accord with his usually deferential manner towards her. Yet the hands were those of a man, and who else could it be?

"Reginald, indeed!" said a well-known voice above her head, while a clear, ringing, merry laugh followed the words, "and that is Reginald, too, I suppose!" added Vivian, as Constance felt two soft arms twined round her waist, and two velvet lips pressed to hers.

The hands were withdrawn from her eyes, and Vivian and Evelyn stood before her.

"Why, what an ingenious plan I fell upon for finding out all the family secrets!" exclaimed Vivian, while Constance threw her arms around his neck and alternately embraced her brother and her lovely sister with tears of joy. "I could not have learned more in a year than that one simple word has revealed to me. Allow me," he continued, with a bow of mock gravity, "to felicitate you, *mademoiselle*, on the prospect of speedily renouncing that insignificant title."

"Ah, Constance!" said Evelyn, "do you remember our discussions at Avonmore? You are now, I am happy to perceive, convinced that Reginald is not a *myth*, as you once affirmed, and pretended to believe."

"But I am not yet convinced that he is not a mythical personage," said Vivian, "for though I had just now rather a startling proof that Constance believes he lives and breathes, you must remember that I have never yet seen him."

"Then permit him to offer some practical demonstration on that long disputed point," said Reginald, who at that moment entered the room, and had caught the last words. "A cordial shake of the hand," he continued, as he affectionately took the hands of Vivian and Evelyn, who as warmly reciprocated his kindly greeting, "will suffice at once to dispel all such mysterious suspicions."

"But how marvellously well you look!" exclaimed Evelyn. "I anticipated the appearance of little less than a ghost, if not a myth, after the terrible accounts that reached us of your adventure during the revolution of the *trois journées*. I am astonished to see you even more than yourself. I fancied that we should find you reclining in an arm-chair, pale and languid, with a lady, who shall be nameless, seated at your side, reading some interesting romance, or perhaps soothing you with her bird-like voice in song."

"You draw a charming picture," replied Reginald, laughing, "though it is one that to a certain extent has been already realized. It has been often said that our misfortunes sometimes prove our greatest blessings in disguise."

He glanced towards Constance, who, blushing and embarrassed at the complete revelation to her brother of the good understanding between herself and Reginald, by the simple circumstance attending their first meeting, had taken refuge behind Evelyn, with her arm around her sister's waist, and her hand still fondly clasped in hers.

"Nay, little Alice must be responsible for all the mischief in which I have been engaged ever since we arrived," said Vivian, as he took the happy child in his arms, and seated her on his knee. "While Evelyn and I were engaged in exchanging greetings and welcomes with my father and mother, she devised this very original surprise for our dear little sister."

"*A propos* of surprises and disguises," said Evelyn, addressing herself to Reginald, "we heard some singular reports during our recent sojourn in Florence, concerning a lady particularly conversant in these arts. I think this lady must have been a special friend of yours," added Evelyn, laughing, while it was now Reginald's turn to blush; and he did blush most undeniably.

His manifest confusion only increased the merriment of Evelyn.

"Ah, now I am sure the gossiping world was not far wrong in the suspicions entertained about you and this accomplished young lady. You have just come in time to hear the prettiest little romance imaginable," she continued, as Mr. and Mrs. Melville at that moment joined the gay party; and they all rose to offer the most comfortable corners to the seniors of the family group.

"The gossiping circle we met with at Florence," pursued Evelyn, "told a strange tale of a fair young damsel, though she was old enough to have more discretion than she mani-

fested, as she could not be less than twenty-four. She had taken it into her head to captivate a young gentleman of about her own age, but apparently far more discreet than herself. Possessing boundless wealth, much cleverness, and brilliant accomplishments, she thought it only necessary to give the youth a hint of the fancy she had taken for him. To her surprise, he remained profoundly insensible to her charms. He left this city and went to Florence, leaving the damsel in suspense, if not in despair. But, recovering from the first shock of his flight, she speedily found some pretext for paying a visit to the fair city of flowers, where the young gentleman had preceded her. The false friend, who accompanied her on this singular errand, wearied out with the insufferable caprices and tyranny of Miss Almeria Belmont, betrayed her —

"Pardon me," interposed Reginald earnestly, and forgetting the suspicions attached to himself, as the hero of Evelyn's romance, in his eagerness to do justice wherever he perceived the existence of what he considered a wrong. "This description hardly does justice to Miss Belmont. She has some good qualities, though they are often concealed beneath those of vanity and selfishness, which she has been taught to look upon as virtues."

Evelyn had permitted him to enter on his defence of Almeria without interruption, and then replied, very demurely, "I am sure we shall be all much edified by the explanation you can, doubtless, so kindly and satisfactorily make of the conduct of a young lady who, if the gossips speak truth, is somewhat in want of a champion. But I am happy to conclude my romance by informing you that she has found one. By way of contradiction to the rumours which met her everywhere, or in a sudden fit of caprice or pique, Miss Belmont bestowed her hand on a German banker, the Baron Von Griffe, who has recently acquired his title by his wealth. He is said to have twice as many millions as her father, and is several years older than that worthy personage."

"Almeria Belmont is then married?" inquired Mrs. Melville.

"Actually married," said Evelyn.

"I do not envy her," said Constance, laughing, "if her choice has fallen upon the old gentleman we met with the only time we were at her father's house last winter, and who was presented to us as the Baron Von Griffe. I remember ~~on~~ that occasion having heard him spoken of as a person of

immense fortune, but intolerably penurious, with a constitution of iron, yet making his infirmities a pretext for avoiding the duties and pleasures of society. A union with such a person, even with all his millions, could hardly promote the happiness of a young lady."

"Ah," said Mrs. Melville, smiling, "I see you are all jealous of Miss Belmont's success. The Baroness Von Griffe will doubtless be the leader of ton in the *aristocratie financière*, at least; she will be the star of the *Chaussée d'Antin*. Her millions will insure the position."

"*Qu'elle les garde!*" said Evelyn, laughing, "we are neither jealous nor envious."

Thus flew on the joyous evening, and it drew to a close too quickly for that happy and united family. It ended, as such days should always end, in deep thankfulness, sincerely felt, and fervently expressed to the Author of every good and perfect gift.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LOVE'S GIFTS.

AT an early and rather unceremonious hour one morning, the young Comte de Beaumanoir, with his beautiful *fiancée*, Beatrice, had called to be presented by Constance to her brother and sister.

During their visit, a tender little scene had been carried on aside between Constance and her friend, relative to two tokens manifesting their sympathy with each other in approaching events, and which had been exchanged that morning;—the one a veil of exquisite lace accompanied by a wreath, in which orange blossoms predominated over the rest of the flowers of which it was composed, and the other a jewelled bracelet of finished workmanship.

The fancy of Beatrice for sending the bridal veil as her souvenir to her friend, had arisen from her frequent contemplation of the ingenious productions of modern art, where the veil only gives a more mysterious beauty to the delicately chiselled features beneath. The exquisite bracelet which Constance had selected as her gift, she naturally associated with the symmetrical arm of her friend,—that arm which had already served an accomplished sculptor for a model.

The thought had been unpremeditated; and the beautiful gifts of equal value and elegance, received at the same instant by both the friends from the messengers who had

passed each other, occasioned a pleasant surprise, and awakened fresh emotions of tenderness in their young hearts.

Reginald had already paid his usual daily visit, and Constance remained in pleasing meditation, her arm resting on the table near which she was seated, and scanning with interest and curiosity the Arabic characters embroidered on a scarf of delicate and singular beauty which he had twined around that arm. He had told her that the sorcerers who could read those mysterious characters had expressed a fervent wish to see her; and fearing some mistake, she had requested that she might be allowed to identify the lady of his love by seeing that token on her arm.

Within the hour of appointment the fair sybil appeared. The gentle nun glided into the room so noiselessly that Constance was hardly aware of her presence, until she approached her nearly. She paused for a moment, and raised her dark eyes to the face of the lovely girl who stood in blushing surprise at her earnest scrutiny.

Apparently the perusal of that face and form awakened emotions of sensibility and kindness, for tears stood in her gazelle-like eyes.

"Lady!" she said in a low and musical voice, "you will pardon my wish to look on that beautiful face. It is, I trust, the fair index of a heart as pure and true as that to which it is soon to be united. Withdrawn from the world, I shall never cease to pray for the welfare and happiness of one, who, in saving the being most dear to me from an ignominious death, and rescuing him from the lingering imprisonment threatened even after his life was preserved, is well entitled to those fervent prayers.

"Permit me," she continued, approaching more nearly and presenting a small casket, "permit me to make an offering to his bride. The jewels this casket contains were part of a noble heritage, and may well adorn one, who is ennobled by the devotion of such a heart as that you now may claim as your own.

She pressed the hand of Constance to her lips and to her brow, and glided from the room as noiselessly as she had entered it.

Half an hour had elapsed, and Reginald found Constance seated at the table where he had left her, the magical scarf still on her arm, and the casket unopened lying near it. Her thoughts had followed the beautiful nun, and were far away from the bridal gift she had so gracefully presented.

Aroused by the return of Reginald from her reverie, she touched the spring of the casket as he entered. To her surprise it contained a diamond necklace of almost priceless value.

"Oh, Reginald!" she exclaimed, "I cannot keep this splendid gift from one almost a stranger to me."

"It will be impossible to return it," said Reginald with a sigh, "if it was offered by the former possessor of that scarf, and I now suppose this was partly her motive in her request that you should wear it on your arm this morning. The fair nun is already on her way to a distant land. Even if it were possible now to seek her out, which it is not, I would not have you give a pang to the noble spirit of Zulema, by refusing her heart-offering, for all the jewels of Golconda. Honour her and her gift then, my own sweet bride," he continued, "as you will, I trust, those which you will permit me to add to hers."

The last visit of the family whose adventures have been related in these pages, before their return to their quiet home, was paid at the château of Neuilly, where the new sovereign held his unostentatious court.

They were received with an unaffected and cordial hospitality. The queen and her lovely daughters were seated around a table, where books and tapestry seemed to have been the sources of their amusement.

"Your majesty will allow me the privilege of appropriating this needle," said Mrs. Melville, as the queen laid down her work. "I should hardly be believed, if I were to aver that I had seen it in such august hands."

The queen smiled, and placing the emblem of her industry in an envelope, inscribed the words "*Souvenir de Neuilly*" upon it, and gracefully returned it to Mrs. Melville.

The hour of parting drew near. The sovereign made his adieu as graciously as his noble consort. "The King of France," he said, "as he ought never to remember the injuries of the Duke of Orleans, so assuredly he will never forget his friends."

The queen offered her hand to say farewell. As Constance raised that hand to her lips, a warm tear fell on it. The amiable lady looked at her for a moment, her own eyes filled, and she embraced the sweet girl with maternal tenderness. "Adieu, my child!" she said. "You were an unconscious instrument in the hands of Heaven for good to us: the blessing of a wife and a mother will rest upon you!"

Before their departure from the metropolis of France, the

lovely Beatrice de Visconti received their congratulations as the Comtesse de Beaumanoir. The parting between her and her friend was not without tears; but the promises they made to continue a constant correspondence, and to meet again in after years, were both faithfully kept.

Beatrice passed her happy existence in the fulfilment of domestic duties, as well as those of social life. Her days were divided between the château of her father on the banks of the beautiful and romantic Lago di Como, which eventually became that of herself and her descendants, and her husband's residence in the Faubourg St. Germain. The exercise of her pure and youthful tastes always afforded her more pleasure in the bosom of home, than she ever experienced in the world.

The friendship formed between Madame Laval and her pupils remained undiminished, though they were so widely separated, and their mutual affection and interest were manifested whenever an opportunity was presented of renewing and strengthening those kind feelings.

Antoine and his family emigrated to the western world, where his industry and fidelity met an ample recompense. Even after an abundance of worldly goods had succeeded a modest competency, he exercised his talent in ornamental gardening, and the evidences of his taste may yet be seen in those places where he resided, before he was established in a home of his own. His children, trained in sound principles and to useful labour, followed in his footsteps, and well merited the favour they found in their adopted land.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

SPRING in its early freshness found the family re-established at their own loved and quiet home, and amid "showers of roses" Reginald received the hand of his lovely bride.

Mr. Bloomfield tied the irrevocable knot in the handsome country church elsewhere commemorated, and the many kind friends who obeyed the signal of the bell that rung out a cheerful peal, assembled afterwards at Avonmore to offer their hearty congratulations.

A bright and happy day it was.—Bird-voices and spring bloom coming in gushing sweetness from without, and kind and loving hearts exchanging sympathies within.

To enter into the details of that occasion would be to repeat our description of the bridal of Vivian and Evelyn, with only the difference between city and country life. Mr. Walsingham, if he did not, as on the former occasion, give away the bride, bestowed on her a kiss and a blessing almost paternal. The white-robed nymphs were as lovely,—the wedding presents and wedding-cake as abundant.

It may be a circumstance worthy of remark that there was some sweet music on the occasion, and that Mrs. Fowler and Miss Kezia did *not* favour the company with a song. The doctor resigned his pretensions to art and the modern tongues, at least when any of Mr. Melville's family were present, and returned to his old friends, the ancients, with whom he was more at home.

Uncle Tom offered an immense nosegay of his choicest flowers to "Miss Constance" on her wedding-day, and as she graciously and gracefully received them, he declared, with tears in his eyes, that "she looked jest like an angel, and moved about like a weepin' willow."

Mammy became an oracle. She always spoke of the *toilette* whenever the subject of dress was alluded to, and was consulted on all matters relative to that important science. With her, a milliner was never mentioned but as a *modiste*, and a mantuamaker as a *couturière*. "When I was in Paris" always silenced any differences of opinion in matters of taste between her and her numerous friends and satellites. A slight feud arose between herself and Uncle Tom, but one which was easily accommodated. He was one day seriously offended because he averred that Mammy had called him a *jardinière*, and he did not consider it respectful to him to call him names. But when assured that a *jardinière* only signifies a fanciful little table designed to contain flowers, he became reconciled to the appellation, which, in defiance of grammatical rules, was constantly applied to him.

It will be naturally asked if this family were as happy at home as they had been in the world? The reader may answer the question, having seen both sides of the picture. It must not be supposed that they lived in perfect seclusion, after the events occupied by the short period of their lives recorded in these pages. They went sometimes into the world, but it was to enhance the beauty and value of home, where their days were passed "amid grass, and flowers, and charitable deeds."

Years have flown by, and groups of beautiful children are seen sporting beneath the shades of the old home. Time

passes on, and the golden links of that circle are still unbroken. Time with them is not the common enemy, whom they unite in a conspiracy to destroy, nor do they seek to abridge their days and moments, that those days and moments may glide by unperceived. They do not paint him with scythe and hour-glass, sprinkling hoar frost on their heads, or laying icy fingers on their hearts. They love rather to represent him on a fleecy cloud, surrounded by the rosy hours, while the early morning scatters dewy flowers in his path.

And so they move on together, loving and loved, in faith and in hope that they will thus and for ever be united, when "time shall be no longer."

THE END.

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